THE RING

ALL TERENCE TIME CRAWFORD GREAT

PLUS: A JOURNEY TO JAPAN FOR INOUE-AKHMADALIEV
FAREWELL RICKY 'THE HITMAN' HATTON
EXCLUSIVE CHRIS EUBANK JR. INTERVIEW

NOVEMBER 2025

“I came for football,
I stayed for more.”

— CRISTIANO RONALDO

Saudi UNREAL CALENDAR

VisitSaudi.com/Calendar

Discover More

Candice Ward

40 THERE WAS ONLY ONE
RICKY HATTON WILL FOREVER BE REMEMBERED AS THE CONSUMMATE PEOPLE’S CHAMPION
By Gareth A Davies

46 THE WEIGHT OF HISTORY
EVEN COMPARED TO PAST CHAMPIONS WHO JUMPED DIVISIONS IN SEARCH OF GLORY, TERENCE CRAWFORD’S VICTORY OVER CANELO ALVAREZ IS A STAGGERING ACHIEVEMENT
By Don Stradley

52 THE FINAL CONFLICT?
CHRIS EUBANK JR. DISCUSSES HIS BLOCKBUSTER REMATCH WITH CONOR BENN AND A CAREER BEYOND FAMILY FEUDS
By Tom Gray

62 SIX DAYS IN NAGOYA
A JOURNEY TO THE LAND OF THE RISING SUN TO WITNESS NAOYA INOUE IN ACTION
By Tom Gray

68 THE REINVENTION
AFTER A HIGH-PROFILE PERFORMANCE THAT FAILED TO IMPRESS, HAMZAH SHEERAZ REGROUPED AND RETURNED WITH A VENGEANCE
By Cormac O’Donnell

76 MYTHICAL MATCHUP: NAOYA INOUE VS. WILLIE PEP
“THE WILL O’ THE WISP” TAKES ON “THE MONSTER” IN A FIGHT FOR THE UNDISPUTED FEATHERWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP
By Ron Lipton

DEPARTMENTS

4 OPENING SHOTS
13 COME OUT WRITING
17 RINGSIDE By Doug Fischer
23 BERNSTEIN ON BOXING
By Al Bernstein
26 STEVE’S SOAPBOX
By Steve Kim
28 BY THE NUMBERS
By Don Stradley
31 RING RATINGS
44 IN MEMORIAM: JOE BUGNER
By Lee Groves
58 HOW TO WATCH BOXING
By Adam Abramowitz
74 FUNDAMENTALS
By Michael Rosenthal
86 COLLECTOR’S SHOWCASE
By Dan Rafael
88 THE FIGHT DOCTOR
By Dr. Margaret Goodman
90 A SLICE OF BOXING
By Thomas Hauser
92 COMMISSIONER’S CORNER
By Randy Gordon
94 FINISHING SHOTS
96 FIGHTLINE

Young fans get a look at Terence Crawford’s new belt at a Raiders vs. Chargers NFL game in Las Vegas.

PIF
صندوق الاستثمارات العامة
PUBLIC INVESTMENT FUND 1971

INVESTED IN
BETTER

ACCELERATING
INNOVATION

That's the PIF Effect

LEARN MORE

NEWS

BEAT THE URGE QUIT SMOKING WIN THE FIGHT

NO.22 OCTOBER 2025

IT'S TIME! TO FIGHT SMOKING

DZRT.COM

18+ This product contains nicotine which causes addiction.

OPENING SHOTS

STALEMATE AT 168: On the Canelo vs. Crawford undercard in Las Vegas, two unbeaten super middleweights put it all on the line in a high-octane thriller. Both Canada's Christian Mbilli (left) and Guatemala's Lester Martinez enjoyed serious success throughout the course of a pulsating 10-round bout. The split draw was deemed a fair result and sets the stage for an immediate rematch.

Sarah Stier

شركة جـــدة الإقتصـــاديـــة
JEDDAH ECONOMIC COMPANY

Smart Data
Strategies to

BOOST

Your Business

We deliver tailored solutions to **maximize** data utilization, transforming insights into actionable decisions that address critical challenges and drive sustainable growth.

FirstData

1stdata.ai

rotana

ROTANA ICONIC
CONCERTS & FESTIVALS
CORPORATE & PRIVATE EVENTS

Rotana Music

روتانا MUSIC

روتانا LIVE

Beyond the Ropes: How KSA's Digital Revolution is Reshaping Boxing

The global fight game is undergoing a seismic shift, and its new center of gravity is in Saudi Arabia. This transformation is driven by a national blueprint that has made sports a cornerstone of economic and social growth. At the heart of this transformation is stc group, the technology powerhouse building the future of boxing with its state-of-the-art digital infrastructure.

A New Golden Era in Riyadh

Forget the old guard. Riyadh Season has become the new standard for mega-fights, making once-impossible matchups a reality, attracting the sport's biggest names with purses that are reshaping the landscape of prizefighting. The evidence for this approach lies in Saudi Arabia's ability to unite rival promoters and their fighters on single fight cards to make previously impossible matchups a reality. Events like the "Day of Reckoning" and the "5 vs 5" in Riyadh are prime examples of this, as they featured top fighters from competing stables and promoters working together to create an environment where the biggest fights can finally happen. This is a strategic way to overcome the traditional fragmentation in the sport that has often prevented these highly anticipated bouts from taking place.

This commitment to elevating the sport extends beyond the ring, with the construction of world-class, purpose-built venues like Kingdom Arena. Saudi Arabia is proving it can deliver on its ambitious vision for sports entertainment. These events serve a strategic purpose: to boost tourism and diversify the economy. This trajectory is underscored by the projected growth of the Saudi sports market, which is expected to swell from $8 billion to a massive $22.4 billion by 2030. Delivering on this vision and sustaining such growth requires a world-class digital backbone.

Powered by stc group: The Digital Corner

For Saudi Arabia, stc group is providing the digital infrastructure that makes these mega-events possible, acting as the key enabler of this transformation. The company's high-speed 5G network is critical, enabling flawless, high-definition live streaming for global broadcasters. It's a vital link between the drama in the ring and millions of fans worldwide, ensuring a seamless viewing experience with zero lag, even with millions of simultaneous users.

Inside the arena, stc group is pushing the envelope of fan engagement. While AR wayfinding that guides fans to facilities and seating, it signals the kind of innovation being developed to elevate future venue experience. Separately, 360° immersive streaming, at home viewing experience with multi angle coverage, that already implemented during the Formula 1 Grand Prix and a recent football match at Kingdom Arena offers a glimpse into the future of how fans will experience live events. These technologies bring fans closer to the action while demonstrating the potential of stc group's infrastructure to transform sports entertainment at scale.

Beyond the ring, stc group's digital footprint supports the entire Riyadh Season festival, from F1 to the Esports World Cup, proving that this is not just a boxing play but a comprehensive digital strategy. This focus on live broadcasting and immersive fan engagement aligns with a broader trend in the global sports industry, which sees content creation and distribution as a top use case for technology like GenAI.

Building a Legacy Beyond the Canvas

This boxing boom is just one facet of a broader sporting ambition, as Saudi Arabia's comprehensive strategy includes parallel investments in sports like football and motorsports. Its rising prominence is evidenced by the country's hosting of more than seven major boxing events since 2021. Saudi is building a culture of sports and a sense of national pride from the ground up, not merely hosting events.

This transformation is fueled by strategic investments and the digital infrastructure provided by partners like stc group. As a leading digital enabler, stc group is a key force behind this shift, providing the advanced infrastructure and technological partnerships that enable these global-scale events and shape the future of sports. By setting a new standard for promotion, production, and global fan interaction, stc group is helping Saudi Arabia build boxing's future, not just host it.

CORE
LIFE

One Pace

EVERY STRIDE BUILDS STRENGTH

COME OUT WRITING

Harry How

KING CRAWFORD

Terence Crawford truly showcased to the world what it's been missing out on. He was exceptional, relentlessly attacking and maintaining his defensive stance throughout the entire 12 rounds. He engaged in toe-to-toe combat with Canelo Alvarez throughout the fight. While I believe Canelo gave it his all, he simply couldn't comprehend Crawford's fighting style. And that's what makes Crawford remarkable – his adaptability. In my opinion, Crawford is the Michael Jordan/GOAT of this era, and he's a fighter every aspiring boxer should study.

Stuart Stilwell

Crawford, gracious in victory, did not try to diminish Canelo's legacy and personally returned the defeated fighter's belts. Canelo, humble in defeat, made no excuses and maintained that he did everything he could to win. He praised the skill of Crawford and admitted the new champion was the better man that evening. These are the kind of role models all men should look toward in today's adversarial age. A true champion has talent, takes real risks and respects both his opponent and the ultimate outcome. This was a beautiful night for boxing on many levels, and I cannot think of a better face for the sport right now than Terence Crawford.

Joe Vandeven

Crawford won because he fought Canelo exactly the way he should have. Through fast footwork (which Canelo lacks), jabs and combos, Bud effectively took him apart. Piece by piece, round by round. He didn't engage in too much power punching; Canelo has a strong chin and has taken heavy blows from big fighters before. I knew that Crawford would win by decision and the fight would go the distance. He effectively put on a boxing clinic. It's not so much heavy punching as it is time-tested, fundamental technique.

Mike Moorhead

Canelo Alvarez is a great fighter. He fought the best of several weight classes in an impressive way. One of the best in years. Then there was Terence Crawford. Not only did he fight the perfect fight, he really fought. Not only was he moving perfectly in and out, he also scored with big shots. It reminded me of Hagler-Leonard. Leonard fought a clever fight, piling up the points necessary to win. Against an all-time great. Canelo said it best: He couldn't get a grip on Crawford. All credit to the winner. And also to the one who lost – fighting hard and no excuses.

Jaap Paulsen

Impossible. That's what many said as Crawford dared to be great. Then they tried saying he was only in it for the payday. I've watched all kinds of narratives, only to watch Bud defeat them all. From "he don't sell" to "he's on the wrong side of the street" to "he is too small." All along the way, TBC took many 0s. He fought every style put in front of him. It took around six years, but he made a meme out of ESJ once he finally got the fight. Even I questioned if Canelo was too big a bite. Once the first three rounds were over, it was clear who would win. The fight reminded me of the Spence fight, except Canelo has a chin.

Bud Crawford cemented himself in the top five pound-for-pound of all time. His legacy of what he does for the kids and the city of Omaha will live way past his sports legacy. I don't forget either that it takes his whole team. TBC listening to trainers made everything possible.

Eric D

Contrary to the popular narrative that Crawford destroyed Canelo and dominated the fight, that simply isn't accurate. This was a much closer contest than people realize. I encourage everyone to rewatch it – without commentary – and carefully score each round. Yes, Crawford did win, but by a razor-thin margin. His clean combinations against the so-called boogeyman of the 168-pound division naturally created excitement and earned him well-deserved credit. But let's be clear: This was not a one-sided performance. Crawford pulled ahead in the final rounds, but it wasn't domination – it was a tactical edge, and just barely.

As a side note, Canelo looked like a man who's lost some of his hunger. He came to box, not to destroy – and against an all-time great like Crawford, that's a dangerous strategy. The Canelo who fought GGG or who stopped Caleb Plant would have had a much better shot here. With more aggression, motivation, better combination work and less telegraphing, he could've pushed Crawford into real trouble. If Canelo can make those adjustments – and rediscover that ruthless edge – a rematch could be a very different story.

J. Armando Lopez

I've been telling everyone that would listen that Crawford was going to win. He is too skilled to get caught by anything Canelo had. Real boxing fans won a lot of money on September 13.

Ed Lysaght

You always hear the old saying in boxing: "Styles make fights." To me, that's what this whole Crawford-Canelo fight came down to. Crawford's ability to adjust, control range and set traps was always going to give him the edge. Canelo's a powerhouse, no doubt, but I figured Crawford's style – measured, patient – and boxing IQ would pile up the rounds on the scorecards. That's why I leaned toward him winning a decision.

What I wasn't sure about, though, was whether the judges would actually give it to him. I've watched enough boxing to know that sometimes the guy who deserves it doesn't always get the nod (Triple G's fights with Canelo still stick in my head). So, yeah, I had that concern in the back of my mind.

But wow, what a fight, and was I happy with how it all turned out. Crawford showed why he's special, and the right guy got the decision. Both guys carried themselves with class and respect after the fight. That's the kind of thing boxing needs more of, and I hope we keep seeing it.

Jason Young

Crawford outclassed Canelo with humility and precision – no swagger, just fists writing legacy. Hatton, the "Hitman," gave us nights of thunder, Blue Moon roaring, and later showed his greatest fight in shedding weight and reclaiming health. Two champions, two eras, one truth: Greatness is grit.

Ingrid Windsor Joseph

Ricky Hatton will always be a true fan favorite.

RICKY HATTON

While I never met or saw Ricky Hatton in person, I grew up watching him as a kid and was a huge fan. I grew up in the Arctic Region of Canada, where boxing is not a prominent sport, so I constantly watched it growing up, and some of the strongest memories I have are of watching Hatton vs. Malignaggi. I lost my mind over that fight. I even created my own homemade sign that said "Hitman" on there and would sing along with the crowd chants from the TV while watching it in the living room with my uncles. I was such a huge fan of him as a kid that I cried when he lost to Pacquiao. I couldn't even watch boxing for a while after that. His style, attitude, look, resilience and overall personality were all just few of the many amazing qualities that Ricky Hatton had, not only as a fighter but as a human being. His ability to have an impact on so many people across the world is amazing to me, even to inspire some kid like I was. Rest in peace, Ricky.

Kyzer Hehn

In 2014, I was an aspiring boxing writer and produced some articles for free for various websites. I got in contact with Ricky's agent, Paul Speak, for an interview with Ricky for an article I was writing. Ricky took nearly 30 minutes out of his day to happily chat to me on the phone and answer my questions. My name had no weight that I could bring to the table. This just summed Ricky up. A true man of the people who had time for everyone. A rare trait for an athlete who reached the pinnacle of their sport, as he did. He really was just "one of the lads" that happened to gain fame. And it never, ever changed him.

Frank Walsh

When we talk about the greatest boxers of all time, we often discuss their impact both on the sport and outside of it, and to me, Ricky Hatton filled out both criteria. He had wars with some of the best of the generation; for a time, he seemed indestructible, which is why, when he opened up about his struggles, he became a hero. To see someone so strong, so determined, brought low by something that most of us are afraid to admit, was pure inspiration. Ricky was loved because he gave us all hope. Inside and outside of the ring, his heart won ours. During an interview, Ricky was asked how he'd like to be remembered, and he replied, "I'd like to be remembered as the world champion that was one of us." There are billions of "us," but there will only ever be one Ricky Hatton. Rest easy, champion.

James Hack

I fought and fought with my mother 20 years ago for her to let my uncle take me to the Tszyu-Hatton fight. What came in the aftermath of Ricky pulling it off was a buzz and a special bond where me and my mother would watch the big fights together. I was messaging her about how sad it was to see Canelo potentially past his best, though credit to Crawford. Then something really sad came along.

Ricky was an icon in and out of the ring, and for me and many others, no doubt, gave people something to bond over and get behind, much like our football clubs. Gutted with the news. May he finally be at peace. A true legend of a man who had time for everyone. He will never be forgotten.

Danny Selvidge

The first superfight I attended was Gatti-Mayweather in 2005. After the bout's conclusion, a potential matchup loomed between Mayweather and recently crowned lineal junior welterweight champion, Ricky "Hitman" Hatton. As the venue emptied, I maneuvered my way toward the cage separating the floor from the lower bowl, hoping to get a glimpse of a celebrity or one of my boxing heroes. As one guard approached me to usher me from the arena, Hitman caught my eye maybe 50 feet beyond the barrier. I yelled out to him, "Mr. Hatton, would you be willing to take a picture with a fan?" He walked right up to me and, with the help of that same guard, my brother and I got a pic with the champ.

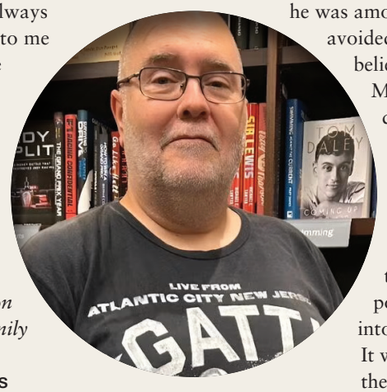
A decade later, we would cross paths once again at the concessions for Mayweather-Pacquiao. Gracious as ever, he once again granted my request for a picture and said he remembered me when I shared my recollection of our previous interaction. I was elated to hear about his 2024 IBHOF induction. Ricky Hatton was a warrior and a class act who adored his fans. The boxing community has lost a legend.

Thomas C

THOMAS GERBASI

I mourn the loss of Thomas Gerbasi with the rest of the Ring staff. He was a superlative, top-shelf boxing writer, a wordsmith, and anything he wrote was a delicious read. I would communicate with him complimenting his inspirational writing for many years, and he was always sweet and gracious to me in his responses. He had a good sense of humor and was above all a good man with a kind heart. So sorry for our collective loss of a friend and great writer.

Ron Lipton and family



Tom Gerbasi's contribution cannot be overstated.

When hockey was on strike/lockout in the early and mid-2000s, Tom gave me the opportunity to start covering boxing. Up to that point, I was just a massively passionate fan but learned from my dad about pugilism. But Tom got me involved. MaxBoxing, Ring Magazine, Yahoo, whatever... I owe all of my boxing memories to Tom.

But it went deeper than that; he taught me how to write in long form. To tell a story. And that helped me win an Emmy Award in 2014 for Madison Square Garden (New York Rangers). And Tom was one of very few people I called after I won. But this call wasn't to gloat. It was just thanking him for everything he did for me – which he obviously deflected humbly.

Gosh. I can't believe I'm never going to talk to him again. Literally tears in my eyes. I was about to text him during the Canelo-Crawford broadcast complaining how late the main event is starting on the East Coast. Maybe I'll start up my East Coast notebook for Ring again in memory of Tom. Man, this hurts.

David Kolb

MIKE MCCALLUM

Thank you to The Ring for the article on the late, great Mike McCallum (September 2025). "The Bodysnatcher" was one of the best fighters of his era. May he rest in peace. Because he was so talented, he was among the most avoided (although I don't believe Marvelous Marvin Hagler ducked anyone). McCallum's biggest career mistake was joining the Kronk boxing team, turning many potential opponents into sparring partners. It wasn't until he left the Kronk gym and went to the Duvas that McCallum got fights with ex-stablemates David Braxton and Milton McCrory. In McCallum's greatest career victory, his KO of Donald Curry, he once again came from behind to launch that titanic, tremendous hook. In honor of Mike McCallum, The Ring should have a Mythical Matchup of The Bodysnatcher vs. Hitman Hearns.

Wise E. Gardner II

Write To The Ring!
Email comeoutwriting@gmail.com or use this address: P.O. Box 90254, Brooklyn, NY 11209

Bettmann

THE RING

November 2025
Volume 102, No. 12

Founder
Nathaniel Fleischer (1888-1972)

Owner
His Excellency Turki Alalshikh

Editor-in-Chief
Douglass Fischer

Managing Editor
Tom Gray

Senior Editor
Brian Harty

Creative Director
Lamar Clark

Controller
Deborah L. Harrison

Subscription Inquiries
Back Issues Inquiries
Digital Orders Inquiries
The Ring Magazine
Subscriber Service Dept.
PO Box 16027
North Hollywood, CA 91615-6027
Phone: 818-286-3101
rngcs@magserv.com

Send Editorial Comments To:
comeoutwriting@gmail.com
or P.O. Box 90254
Brooklyn, NY 11209

THE RING (ISSN: 0035-5410) November 2025, is published 12 times per year by The Ring Magazine FZ, LLC P.O. Box 90254 Brooklyn, NY 11209. Postmasters: Send change of address Notices to: The Ring Magazine Subscriber Service Dept., PO Box 16027, North Hollywood, CA 91615-6027, Phone: 818-286-3101; rngcs@magserv.com. Single copy price $9.99 in U.S.A. ,10.99 Canada (£10.99 in the U.K.). Global Subscription price $60.00 for 12 issues plus S&H. Not responsible for the loss or non-return of unsolicited articles or photographs, which will not be returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed envelope bearing the proper amount of postage. The entire contents of this magazine are copyright ©2025 The Ring Magazine FZ-LLC. No part of this magazine may be reproduced without the written permission of the publisher. All rights reserved. Publisher is not responsible for the accuracy of the content of advertisements appearing in this magazine, nor the delivery or quality of merchandise or services offered. No endorsement of any such advertisement is intended or implied. Advertisers and agencies assume liability for claims arising from the content of their advertisements. FOR ADVERTISING INQUIRIES AND RATES: advertising@ringmagazine.com. U.S. / Canadian and International distribution by Comag Marketing Group LLC, 155 Village Blvd #200, Princeton, NJ 08540. UK distribution by Seymour Distribution Ltd., 2 East Poultry Avenue, London, England, EC1A 9PT. Printed In USA and the UK.

RINGSIDE By Doug Fischer

GREATNESS ACHIEVED

I can't say much about Terence Crawford's performance against Canelo Alvarez that hasn't already been said.

The 38-year-old veteran is finally getting his flowers as one of the best – if not THE best fighter – of his generation since annexing the undisputed super middleweight championship from the Mexican superstar on September 13.

What I can add to the accolades – and feel comfortable doing so as someone who's covered world-level boxing for more than 25 years – is that Crawford's unanimous decision over Alvarez ranks among the finest legacy-boosting victories of this century.

With one awe-inspiring performance, Crawford (42-0, 31 KOs) became the first male three-division undisputed champion of the sanctioning body era, reclaimed the No. 1 spot in The Ring's pound-for-pound rankings, made our choice for Fighter of the Year a no-brainer and elevated himself from a first-ballot Hall of Famer to an all-time great.

If you think it's premature to attach "great" to Crawford's name, consider the legendary company he's in based on his career accomplishments to date:

Crawford is the only fighter to win four divisional Ring titles.

- **Crawford joins Bob Fitzsimmons, Tony Canzoneri, Barney Ross and Henry Armstrong as the only male three-division undisputed champions in the sport's history. (Armstrong was the last to do it – 87 years ago!)**
- **He's the ONLY fighter to win Ring Magazine titles in four weight classes (lightweight, junior welterweight, welterweight and super middleweight), which surpasses three-division**

Ring champs Sugar Ray Leonard (welterweight, junior middleweight and middleweight), Manny Pacquiao (featherweight, junior lightweight and junior welterweight), Floyd Mayweather Jr. (lightweight, welterweight and junior middleweight) and Alvarez (junior middleweight, middleweight and super middleweight).

- **Crawford joins Thomas Hearns, Leonard and Mayweather as five-division world titleholders. (Only six-division titleholder Oscar De La Hoya, seven-division beltholder Amanda Serrano, and Pacquiao, the recordholder with world titles in eight weight classes, exceed that elite foursome.)**

Of the many impressive weight-hopping victories I've witnessed over the decades, Crawford's super middleweight triumph ranks with Roy Jones Jr.'s heavyweight title-winning decision over John Ruiz and Pacquiao's punishing 12th-round stoppage of Miguel Cotto. In terms of performances by a veteran between the ages of 35-40, Crawford outboxing Canelo is up there with Bernard Hopkins' masterclasses against Felix Trinidad and Antonio Tarver, or Pacquiao outpointing Keith Thurman.

Crawford wasn't the only big winner on September 13. The Riyadh Season-backed event, which took place at Allegiant Stadium in Las Vegas, scored several victories for a struggling U.S. boxing scene:

- **The attendance – 70,482 – is the second-biggest indoor gathering for a boxing event in U.S. history.**
- **That astonishing gathering produced a gate of $47.2 million, the third-highest ever for boxing.**
- **The live broadcast on Netflix pulled in more than 41 million global viewers over the weekend and the on-demand replays were the streaming platform's No. 1 or No. 2 ranked TV show in the days that followed.**
- **The event generated 41.9 billion impressions online and across social media conversations, and it was also heavily covered by mainstream and legacy media (The New York Times, ESPN, Sports Illustrated, etc.).**

Most importantly, the fight wasn't a dud.

From my vantage point in the stadium (a floor seat next to Lamar Clark, the creative director of this fine magazine), Crawford was in control from start to finish. However, Canelo landed enough to make it interesting in some rounds, giving his fans hope that he might be able to clip Crawford with a big shot down the stretch of the fight.

Expectations were high for a clash of two pound-for-pound-rated fighters, and they didn't disappoint.

That didn't happen. It was Crawford who raised his game in the championship rounds, and, as it turned out, he needed something special to win by scores of 116-112 and 115-113 (twice).

Again, that's not the fight that I witnessed, but I wasn't scoring the bout, round by round. Pundits and members of the press row media that I respect – including Dan Rafael, Mike Coppinger, Sergio Mora, Adam Abramowitz and Cliff Rold – had the fight even after the 10th round and agreed with the 115-113 score.

If casual fans saw it that way, it's not a bad thing. It means they witnessed a compelling fight. My guess is that the next time a legitimate championship fight is presented on Netflix, they will watch with interest.

Though it hurts my heart to do so, I must acknowledge the passing of two beloved members of the world boxing community – Ricky Hatton and Thomas Gerbasi – the most genuine individuals that I or anyone else had the pleasure of meeting.

Hatton was hands down the most popular British fighter of the 21st century. His fans filled U.K. arenas, particularly in his hometown of Manchester, and they often traveled en masse to his major fights in Las Vegas. They literally took over The Strip for the Jose Luis Castillo, Paulie Malignaggi, Floyd Mayweather Jr. and Manny Pacquiao events. The Hatton-Pacquiao weigh-in was the loudest I ever experienced.

But Ricky wasn't just an attraction, he was a legit junior welterweight badass during the 2000s and he reached the pinnacle of his division and the sport midway through the decade when he stopped Kostya Tszyu to earn the Ring/IBF junior welterweight championship. He added the WBA belt to his collection with a brutal ninth-round KO of Carlos Maussa to clinch The Ring's 2005 Fighter of the Year award. He was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 2024.

Hatton was a frenetic pressure fighter who often fought through bloody facial lacerations as he overwhelmed his opposition, usually with vicious body punching. However, outside of the ring he was a low-key sweetheart, just one of the guys. Somehow, he remained that way throughout the height of his career and fame.

FOR MOMENTS
THAT STAY WITH YOU
VISITQATAR.COM
Ras Abrouq
visit QATAR

I met him in Las Vegas in 2002 while covering Marco Antonio Barrera-Johnny Tapia at the MGM Grand. A member of Barrera's team named Vince Caruso introduced us. Hatton was by himself and nobody recognized him at the lounge where we sat and chatted over a couple beers. Fast forward to 2009. I interviewed him in Los Angeles for a pre-fight promo on his showdown with Pacquiao. He was the exact same guy: down to earth, self-effacing and funny.

Despite his considerable accomplishments, Hatton's legacy is the connection he had with his fans, which could be seen for weeks following his death. Countless photos and selfies taken with Hatton, often after his fights, flooded social media. British boxing royalty and bona fide celebrities posted such images, as did Hatton's former opponents, fellow Hall of Famers, and the media that covered him, but the majority of the posts came from his fans on both sides of The Pond.

Always down to earth, Ricky Hatton embraced many nicknames.

It was the perfect eulogy for a true people's champion.

There has been a depressing amount of deaths in the boxing community this year, but Gerbasi's passing was unfathomable to those who knew him. I still can't wrap my head around it. I'm stunned and maybe in denial that our dear colleague is gone from a heart attack at 57.

A proper tribute to Gerbasi's life and career will be published in the December issue, and there is much to celebrate. Tom was an award-winning journalist and author, a pioneer in online boxing coverage, an early advocate for women's boxing and among the first boxing scribes to embrace mixed martial arts. More importantly, he was a devoted family man of integrity who seemingly made friends with everyone he met. Always generous with his time, he mentored a new generation of combat sportswriters over the past two decades.

Our journalistic journeys in boxing began around the same time, the mid-90s, and we became friends and business partners by the start of the 2000s thanks to his involvement with HouseOfBoxing.com and MaxBoxing.com – pioneering websites that would not have succeeded without him.

The founding owners of MaxBoxing – me, Gary Randall, Steve Kim and Gerbasi – all brought something to our upstart online publication, but Tom was its heart. The fighters came first with Gerbasi, who wrote and edited with compassion and never allowed the seedy business side of boxing to jade him.

He never let his volatile coworkers – which included our eccentric and bipolar star columnist, Michael Katz – shake his good nature, either.

When we bickered and fought among ourselves, it was Tom who brokered peace and reminded us that we were lucky to do what we were doing.

"Lighten up, fellas. This beats cleaning toilets."

Gerbasi, proud of his working-class roots, spoke from experience. I looked up to him and sought his advice on marriage, fatherhood and balancing career and family.

And, yeah, he was the guy I'd vent to whenever Katz bruised my ego or Gary and Steve were driving me crazy. Tom had a way of turning my frustration to laughter.

He used to joke that he was the "bartender." "I'm the guy one of you calls to complain about the others."

He was so much more. He was our big brother. He was our rock. He was the best of us.

Our hearts go out to his wife, Sonia, daughter Jordan and granddaughters Sheala and Olivia. RING

انتركونتيننتال
INTERCONTINENTAL
درّة الرياض منتجع وسبا
DURRAT AL RIYADH
RESORT & SPA

Live the InterContinental Life!

+966 55 502 8498 +966114118800 intercontinental durrat alriyadh resort & spa

SOUNDSTORM 25

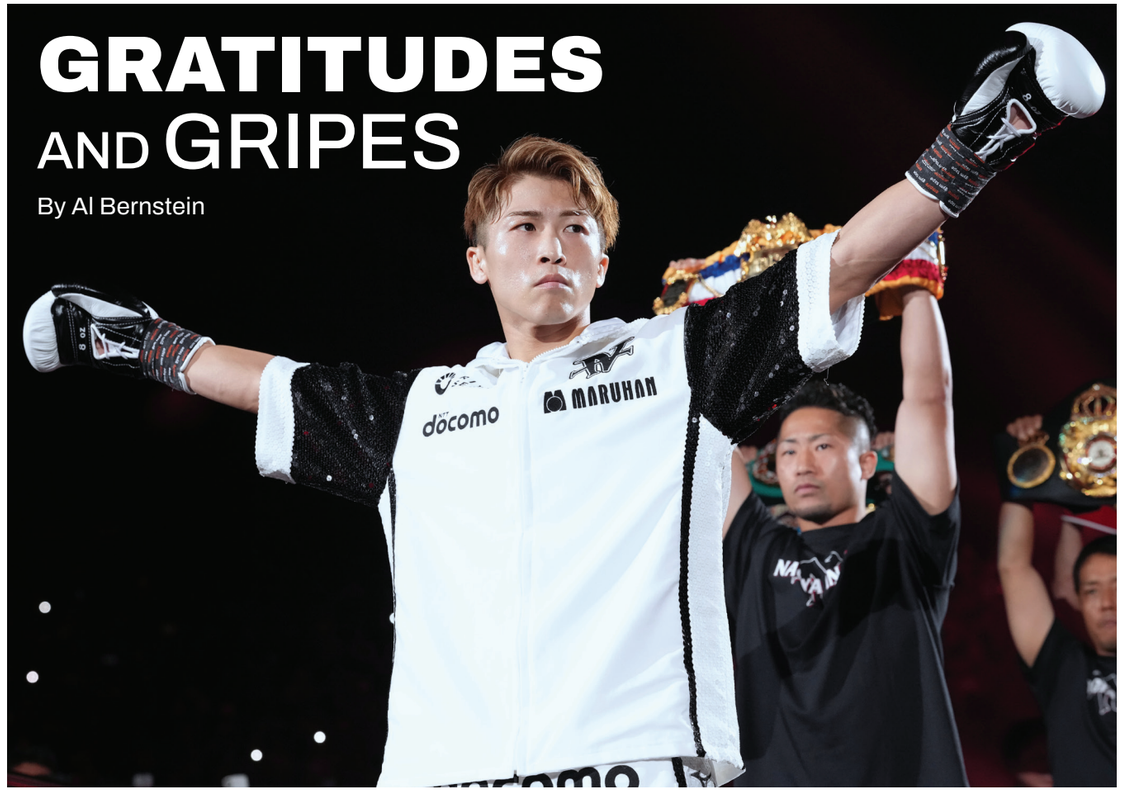
3 DAYS
200+ARTISTS
ONE UNFORGETTABLE STORM

RIYADH, SAUDI ARABIA
DEC 11-12-13, 2025

GET YOUR
TICKETS NOW

GRATITUDES AND GRIPES

By Al Bernstein



Undisputed 122-pound champ Naoya Inoue is still flying high.

This month in the United States, we traditionally set aside a holiday as Thanksgiving – a day to reflect, accentuate any positive aspects of our life and be thankful for it while hopefully surrounded by our friends and family. Or maybe it's just a day to stuff ourselves with turkey and trimmings and watch football until we are bleary-eyed. For the sake of this column, I am sticking with the first option. We boxing fans need to be reminded of all the things we have to be thankful for right now. But, this being boxing, where nothing is totally positive, I will turn this premise on its ear a little. Along with all the things we are thankful for, I will appease the normal fan's mentality and list the things we are NOT thankful for as well. Being me, one of boxing's annoyingly glass-half-full guys, I will start with the positive. I'm thankful for these things:

- **This age of brilliant fighters from Japan shows no sign of slowing down. With several world champions and well over a dozen top contenders in numerous divisions who were either champs at one time this year or could be soon, the Japanese wave of excellence is very real. Then you can add in the fact that virtually all these boxers have a crowd-pleasing, all-action style, and it makes for quite a delightful trend.**

- **Father Time, though still undefeated in boxing, suffered quite a setback this year when Oleksandr Usyk (38) and Terence Crawford (nearly 38 at the time) fought like they were in their prime. Both men solidified their position as two of the top three pound-for-pound fighters in the sport.**

- **At least one champion in the sport, Naoya Inoue (the other challenger for top three pound-for-pound honors), is slated to fight four times in this calendar year. Inactivity by many champions hampers the sport, and he is the poster kid for keeping a fan base involved and satiated.**

- **In a number of instances, judges were able to look past the favorite status of one fighter and award the decision to the actual winner. Several of these upsets include Ricardo Sandoval's win over Kenshiro Teraji, Armando Resendiz's victory against Caleb Plant, Ekow Essuman over Josh Taylor and Tiara Brown beating Skye Nicolson. It is heartening to see this happen, because it is not always so in boxing.**

- **Lester Martinez and Christian Mbilli; Kaye Scott and Olivia Curry; Chris Eubank**

Jr. and Conor Benn; Isaac Cruz and Angel Fierro; Joshua Buatsi and Callum Smith; Kenshiro Teraji and Seigo Yuri Akui; Dmitry Bivol and Artur Beterbiev; Fernando Martinez and Kazuto Ioka; Vergil Ortiz and Israil Madrimov; and David Benavidez and David Morrell shared the ring together. Don't tell me there were not exciting fights this year.

- The best fight the best in women's boxing. Champions always look to unify, and undisputed title fights are frequent. In this regard, women's boxing is a step ahead of its male counterpart. And add to that the fact that promotional companies (especially MVP Promotions and Salita Promotions building on what Matchroom Boxing did) are vigorously promoting the women's game. Major women's fights are now a regular and important part of the boxing schedule. And even more importantly, they are well-fought and fun to watch.

- Talented 140-pounder Andy Hiraoka is finally getting a world title shot. He faces a tough challenge against Gary Antuanne Russell, but Hiraoka is also a force in the ring. I make it a 50-50 battle.

- Boots Ennis may actually be close to running out of C-plus opponents to fight.

- The two judges who gave Elijah Garcia the win over Terrell Gausha don't judge every major boxing match.

- Monique Fundora gave birth to son Sebastian and daughter Gabriela. She gave the world two boxing champions

- Unheralded Abass Baraou got a chance to compete in a major fight and came away with an upset victory that eventually led to world titleholder status. He is an example of a hardworking boxer who has faced long odds at times but never stopped reaching for glory.

And, here are the things I am NOT thankful for:

- The level of astonishingly cruel vitriol spewed at boxers on social media seems to be growing. I understand the passion of fans, but some of what we see there is just hard to take.

- The idea of announcers NOT talking once in a while during a boxing telecast seems to be an option that is seldom taken. A producer once told a verbose play-by-play colleague of mine, "Could you give natural sound a chance?" Good advice.

- Media, fans and even fighters themselves continue to refer to people being the "A" and "B" sides in fights. This infuriates me. There is no A and B – there are only two fighters competing. No other sport does this. When a "1" seed plays a "12" seed in tennis, they don't suggest an A and B side. The same is true when a division leader in baseball, basketball or football plays a last-place team. Nobody uses that phrase. It permeates the promotion and coverage of a fight before, during and after the bout, and in a subjectively scored and sometimes refereed sport like boxing, that promotional advantage can become a more insidious one. It is unfair to one of the participants and often paints a skewed view of the event.

Tank Davis and Jake Paul are out to make an exhibition of themselves.

- Mainstream sports media (especially in the United States) and many casual fans (influenced by that media) believe the novelty fights that happen with such frequency these days represent the face of the sport. They are one-off events done for commerce and mostly don't have any real impact on the standings of the sport. Because they often involve big names from the past or crossover celebrities of the present, they get more attention in some quarters than two current champions in a terrific 50-50 matchup. I'm not attacking the right of novelty fights to exist or whether people should be invested in them. To each his own. I'm simply saying that the sports media and casual fans often suggest they are the best that boxing can offer. That is not the case.

- Not enough platforms (especially but not limited to the U.S.) want to show the sport. Platforming is an issue for the sport as much as the usual one: getting mainstream media to cover boxing.

- There are still interfering and oftentimes biased actions taken by referees in fights. This has been a trend in recent years and is not abating. We often concentrate on the poor and sometimes biased judging, but referees are guilty of those offenses as well, and they often deeply impact a fight.

I will not end this column with negative thoughts, because on the whole I want us to be thankful for the good in the sport we enjoy so much. So, let me say the one thing that I think we can all agree on: We are thankful for the courageous and talented men and women who are willing to train hard for weeks and often months and then go into the ring to do battle to create a great boxing match. I have covered and known boxers for 45 years, and my respect for them has never waned, nor should it. We need to be thankful that these people exist, for they are the lifeblood of boxing.

Insure what you love.
Car. Home. Health. Pet.
Shory.
Insurance. But good.
Licensed by the Central Bank of the UAE

LAST OF THE MOHICANS

By Steve Kim

Canelo kept up the activity even when he reigned supreme.

By the time you read this, Saul Alvarez's record will either be 64-2-2, 63-3-2 or 63-2-3, depending on the outcome of his September 13 showdown with Terence Crawford.

Regardless of the result from that Saturday night at Allegiant Stadium in Las Vegas, chances are the 35-year-old Mexican veteran will fight for at least a couple more years. Which means that there is a very high probability that Canelo will finish his Hall of Fame career with around 70 fights (or more) on his ledger.

Yeah, we can be critical of this recent matchmaking or quibble with some of the decisions he's received, but we should appreciate that this is a star who has actually put in the work throughout his career and has done more than his share to carry the sport for the past decade or so. When he walks off into the sunset, we will not see a fighter of his caliber put in nearly as many fights.

He is the last of a dying breed.

Ask yourself this: Which current boxer today will even break the 50-fight threshold? Some will barely get to 40.

While the money for the game's elite has risen, unfortunately the activity level for all boxers in the modern game has declined sharply. This business has changed, and not for the better. Fighters aren't as seasoned as they fight for world titles, and then they're not able to consistently sharpen their tools once they win world titles. It wasn't always this way.

Case in point: Hall of Famer Buddy McGirt, a two-division champ. He already had 38 bouts to his credit (36-1-1) when he finally won his first world title (IBF junior welterweight belt) against Frankie Warren in February 1988. Unfortunately, he lost his title to the gifted Meldrick Taylor two fights later. But instead of wallowing in his defeat, McGirt performed eight times the following year in what was his eighth year as a pro.

"Sometimes it's not always about the money; it's about keeping your tools sharp," said McGirt, now an accomplished trainer. "The only way you're going to keep them sharp is by fighting and staying busy. You never know when you might get that opportunity."

McGirt laments, "Today's guys, everybody wants to stay undefeated. They're worried about losing."

Perhaps that's an issue, but many of today's boxers who are signed with the major promoters have built-in minimums that can prohibit activity if they are too pricey. McGirt says he just negotiated fight-by-fight during his career, calibrating his expectations based on the level of the opponent.

"I listen to some guys talk, and they say, 'Yeah, they offered me x amount of dollars and I ain't taking that shit.' And I'm saying to myself, 'You're crazy.'"

Nowadays, long-term exclusive promotional contracts come with minimum purse guarantees as the boxer advances from prospect to contender to world titleholder. These payment tiers often lock boxers into a limited number of fights once the fighter reaches contender or world level because their handlers don't want to fight for anything less than their guarantee, regardless of who the boxers are paired with. Activity becomes stifled as the money increases.

Boxers have always had agreements with promoters, but the business was different back in McGirt's day.

"In '88 or '89, you got a call from ABC. They're going to give you $150,000. Who's going to turn that down? Now guys look at $150,000 like, 'You're joking.'"

Basically what happens now is that a young, promising fighter like Shakur Stevenson will win a world title in his early 20s in his 13th pro fight, and then, as his contracted minimums elevate because he's now a champion, he quickly gets relegated to boxing twice a year on the platform in which his promoter has an exclusive output deal with.

There was a time when there were non-title bouts in which champions could earn a few bucks for facing lesser opposition. Again, this wasn't about the money. "This is what you do, and this is what you love. So you've got to stay sharp," said McGirt, whose final career mark was 73-6-1 (48 KOs).

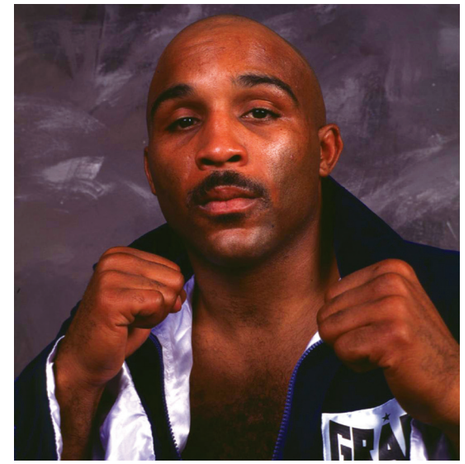
While some would argue that boxers today are saving themselves from wear and tear by fighting less, others would counter that layoffs necessitating long "comeback" training camps are actually putting more mileage on a fighter's odometer.

"I get frustrated, because I say to myself that in this game, you can get old walking up the stairs. I'm not going to say that they don't get it, because when you're young and making money, you say, 'It's never going to happen to me.' But it happens," said McGirt. "Now it's just about the money, and sometimes these promoters just give in to these guys. Whereas back in the day, if you didn't take a fight, they said, 'OK, no problem.' They'd call somebody else."

Carl Moretti, the VP of boxing operations for Top Rank, says that one battle they face often is trying to convince boxers and their representatives that staying active and having to take less money at times will pay off in the long term. But the common retort is: "We're not going backward on the money." Even if they go backward on the quality of the opponent.

"We try to tell them, 'Don't look at it as going backwards; look at it as one total amount for two fights,'" stated Moretti, who began his career at MSG Boxing, where he worked closely with McGirt. What was done then simply would not happen now.

"Those eight fights, [McGirt's] biggest purse was probably $100,000," recalled Moretti. McGirt was so active that he literally took a fight on a week's notice. After defeating Tony Baltazar in early July, he was offered a bout versus Gary Jacobs for August 27.



Hall of Famer Buddy McGirt fought 80 times as a professional.

"I just came from the movies. I was just getting ready to start camp that Monday to fight Gene Hatcher in September," recalled McGirt. His manager, Al Certo, left a message telling McGirt that Edwin Rosario had pulled out of a bout against Jacobs. The offer was for $50,000. "I said, 'We can't turn down $50,000 in a week. You crazy?'"

McGirt's plan was simple: Just spar all week leading into that fight at the Felt Forum inside Madison Square Garden. Certo was a bit hesitant until his fighter laid it out to him logically. "I said, 'Al, let me ask you a question: Would you rather get a cut of $50,000 in one week or a cut of $25,000 after four weeks?'" recalled McGirt. "He said, 'I'll see you tomorrow, you cocksucker.'"

That following Sunday, McGirt scored a 10-round decision victory – and then fought twice more that year. In November 1991, he put on a career-best performance by riddling the hard-punching Simon Brown over 12 rounds to capture the WBC 147-pound strap.

"If you look at his activity going into the Simon Brown fight, compared to [Brown] we knew we were going to win the fight," said Moretti. "One, we thought we were the better fighter. Two, the activity got Buddy there. He took two fights at $25,000 just to stay active. He said, 'I just want to stay sharp.' Now, he wasn't fighting King Kong, but it's like the quarterback – it's about timing and rhythm."

Facing Brown was McGirt's fifth outing of the year. Brown had boxed just three times in 1990 and 1991 combined coming into that battle. McGirt had a mark of 54-2-1 at the time.

Alvarez has now settled into being the usual twice-a-year fighter, but as late into his 20-year career as 2021, he actually performed three times as he vanquished the trio of Avni Yildirim, Billy Joe Saunders and Caleb Plant on his way to the undisputed super middleweight crown. He did this while being the biggest brand in boxing. Too many modern-day boxers lament their lack of popularity – or what they are getting paid – and oftentimes fail to realize that they themselves haven't done enough on their end to justify either.

There are a few reasons why Alvarez is the game's biggest star. Yeah, being Mexican has certainly helped. But just getting out there and consistently doing the job more than his colleagues has also played a part.

"Canelo stayed busy. He's making a ton of money, but he was fighting people," said an admiring McGirt. "You saw every two, three months, he was getting ready to fight somebody. You don't see that today. Guys fight, take four, five months off. I mean, I understand you're making a lot of money … but damn." RING

BY THE NUMBERS:

WILLIE "THE WORM" MONROE

by Don Stradley • Illustration by KronkAAAArt

He was one of the key figures of the 1970s Philadelphia boxing scene, fighting gamely alongside such stars as Bennie Briscoe, Bobby "Boogaloo" Watts and Eugene "Cyclone" Hart. Nicknamed "The Worm" because of his silky-smooth style, Willie Monroe was a top middleweight contender at a time when the division was, to borrow lyrics from an old bubblegum hit, jammed up and jelly-tight with talent. Now, if you'll pardon the reference to Tommy Roe, let's get on with Willie the Worm. Here's his story by the numbers.

3
bouts with Marvelous Marvin Hagler »

It was occasionally heard among Hagler's inner circle that Willie Monroe was the only opponent to legitimately beat the Marvelous One. Hagler's other losses were hotly disputed, but not the loss to Monroe. Granted, the admission of defeat was usually said in a whisper, and usually with a qualifier – something about Hagler having a head cold – but there was no debating that The Worm got the best of Hagler that first time they met at the Philadelphia Spectrum. Even Hagler, who despised losing the way Hannibal despised Rome, was agreeable to the scorecards going Willie's way. The fight, Hagler said, "was tough but honest."

Monroe put on a clinic that blustery March night in 1976, using a strong jab to burst a vessel in Hagler's nose, causing a steady stream of crimson to pour from Hagler's snout throughout the fight, and rocking him several times with short, sneaky rights. "I like to think I took him back to school," Monroe said years later. Under the guidance of trainer George Benton, Monroe made Hagler back up and often outpunched him three and four blows to one. When they stood toe-to-toe, as the Philadelphia Inquirer reported, Monroe's punches seemed as if they "were fired out of a howitzer, while Hagler's were the popgun variety." The official scores, to the delight of the Spectrum crowd, were 47-44, 49-41 and 48-42, all for Monroe, who had trained for another opponent and only realized he was fighting Hagler on five days' notice.

The fight, however, was a financial flop. A good Spectrum boxing show could draw between 6,000 and 11,000 customers, but only 3,459 turned out to see Monroe's finest moment thanks to a major snowstorm. The weather, which resulted in five inches of snow on city streets and one fatality, even prevented the film crew from showing up, meaning that Monroe's dominating performance against the soon to be mythical Hagler was not recorded for posterity.

Hagler and Monroe met again in February 1977. This time before a Boston crowd, Hagler earned revenge by scoring a TKO at 1:20 of Round 12. Then, when the pair returned to the Spectrum for the rubber match later that year, Hagler put a dramatic end to their series by scoring a second-round knockout. Yet it was that first fight, won by Monroe, that seemed to change the course of middleweight history, for Hagler came out of it admitting, "I have a lot to learn." And so he did, which led to some hard times for the middleweight class over the next decade.

20
consecutive wins to start his career »

Monroe was Alabama-born but grew up in Crestview, Florida, the 13th of 17 siblings. After a 43-0 amateur career, he arrived in Philadelphia in the fall of 1969, joining the stable of trainer/manager Yank Durham, whose main moneymaker was heavyweight champion Joe Frazier. Monroe started his pro career with a flourish, winning six straight at Philly's vaunted fight club, The Blue Horizon. By March of 1972, he'd won 20 in a row with 16 knockouts.

1
controversial loss to a Frenchman »

Monroe's winning streak ended with a trip to Paris, where he lost a disputed split decision to popular French contender Nessim Max Cohen. Though he tired a bit at the end, Monroe managed to put Cohen on the canvas in Round 3 and seemed to win most of the other rounds. For two of the judges, this wasn't enough to send Monroe home with the win. Even Cohen's French fans jeered the verdict, feeling the American had won.

0
title shots »

Though Durham hoped to see Monroe fight for the middleweight title held by Carlos Monzon, it wasn't to be. According to Monroe, Durham's death in 1973 effectively curtailed his progress. Trainer Eddie Futch, who took over the Durham stable, put his focus on Frazier. Talking to the Philadelphia Daily News in 1987, Monroe said he'd had the talent to be a champion, but when Durham died, "My chances went up in smoke."

It is also possible that the golden age of Philadelphia middleweights was simply too packed with talent. Briscoe, the most popular of the bunch, would fight for the title three times, while the rest were seemingly stranded in Philadelphia, fighting each other in what appeared to be an endless round-robin tournament with no clear winner and no discernable prize. Though he dropped a decision to Philly's Bobby Watts, Monroe notched wins over such local favorites as Cyclone Hart and Stanley "Kitten" Hayward, plus a 10-round decision over Philly regular by way of Ohio, Billy "Dynamite" Douglas. But after his three bouts with Hagler, Monroe seemed on a bumpy downhill skid, going 3-4 before retiring in 1981. His final pro record was 40-10-1 with 26 KOs.

14
fights at the Philadelphia Spectrum »

Monroe was a reliable attraction at all the Philadelphia fight venues, including the Philadelphia Arena, the Convention Hall and The Wagner Ballroom, but the Spectrum was where Philly legends were made, and Monroe's name on the marquee usually meant something special was happening. Even at the end of his run, Monroe went out with a serious bang, his final Spectrum bout being a 10-round slugfest with a much younger Curtis Parker. Monroe lost on the scorecards, but his effort was a spirited farewell to a building that must've felt like home. J Russell Peltz, promoter of the Spectrum bouts, rated Monroe's loss to Parker as an "all-Philly classic" and one of Monroe's two greatest nights in the ring, along with beating Hagler.

73
years on Earth »

Monroe (1946-2019) was a family man, married to his wife, Barbara, for 51 years and working multiple jobs to put his daughter through college, including stints with Philadelphia Gas Works and driving a truck for the Philadelphia Inquirer. Monroe refereed some bouts, too, but seemed content to leave boxing in his past.

Though he stood among the best, Monroe wasn't without critics. At different times, he was accused of ducking opponents and being coddled by Durham. He eventually proved his critics wrong, taking on all comers and performing gallantly when he was up against a tough rival. Yet there was always a sense that Monroe could've achieved more. Peltz, who not only promoted Monroe's bouts but was also a friend to the fighter, said at the time of Monroe's death that The Worm was not entirely trusting of his immense talents. "At times, I believe he doubted his own skills," Peltz wrote for BoxingScene.com. "It's hard to tell how far he could have gone with just a little more self-confidence."

It is scary to imagine the man who whooped Hagler with a little more self-confidence. Then again, if the hallmarks of a Philly fighter are bravery, skill, toughness and grit, then Willie Monroe checked all the boxes. There wasn't much more we could've expected from him, and it's hard to envision a middleweight contender of his day being any better than The Worm. RING

THE HEALTHIER KNOCKOUT
COLA WITH DATES EXTRACT
كولا بمستخلص التمر
ميلاف
MILAF
كولا
Cola
CARBONATED DRINK مشروب غازي
COLA WITH DATES EXTRACT
ميلاف
MILAF
Cola
HEAVYWEIGHT SPONSOR
تـــراث الـــمدينـــة
AL MADINAH HERITAGE
A PIF COMPANY
@drinkmilaf
www.milaf.com.sa
SAUDI MADE

Ring Ratings

Through fights of September 20, 2025

Ed Mulholland

Recent Fight Results

MEN

H: Anthony Joshua (No. 5, removed for inactivity)
168: Osleys Iglesias (No. 3, ▲1) TKO 8 Vladimir Shishkin (No. 9, out)
168: Terence Crawford (in at C) UD 12 Canelo Alvarez (C, ▼1)
168: Christian Mbilli (No. 1, ▼2) D 10 Lester Martinez (No. 10, ▲6)
160: Erislandy Lara (No. 3, removed for inactivity)
154: Brandon Adams (in No. 7) UD 10 Serhii Bohachuk (No. 6, ▼4)
140: Liam Paro (No. 5) moved up
130: Eduardo Nunez (No. 5) UD 12 Christopher Diaz-Velez
122: Naoya Inoue (C) UD 12 Murodjon Akhmadaliev (No. 2, ▼1)
118: Christian Medina (in at No. 2) TKO 4 Yoshiki Takei (No. 2, ▼5)
118: Junto Nakatani (C) moved up
115: Pedro Guevara (No. 7, out) D 10 Alexis Molina Aguirre
108: Anthony Olascuaga (No. 8, ▲2) TKO 2 Juan Carlos Rivera
108: Jayson Vayson (No. 10) moved down
105: Knockout CP Freshmart (No. 3) TKO 4 Saichon Wongwai
105: Ryusei Matsumoto (No. 6, ▲1) TD 5 Yuni Takada (No. 5, ▼3)
105: Takeshi Ichii (No. 9, ▲2) UD 10 Jake Amparo
105: Oscar Collazo (C) KO 7 Jayson Vayson

WOMEN

147: Sandy Ryan (No. 3, ▲1) UD 10 Jade Grierson
147: Stephanie Aquino (No. 5, ▲1) TKO 2 Marie Pier Houle
126: Tiara Brown (No. 1) UD 10 Emma Gongora
112: Gabriela Fundora (C) KO 7 Alexas Kubicki (No. 5, out)
108: Evelin Bermudez (No. 1) TKO 1 Sara Bailey (No. 5)
102: Eri Matsuda (No. 2) MD 8 Sana Hazuki

MEN'S RING RATINGS Through Sept. 20, 2025

CHAMPIONSHIP BELTS: ◆ RING ◆ IBF ◆ WBA ◆ WBC ◆ WBO | ★ NEW TO RATINGS

HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT UNLIMITED

C		**OLEKSANDR USYK** ◆◆◆◆◆ Ukraine • 24-0-0 (15 KOs)
1		**TYSON FURY** U.K. • 34-2-1 (24 KOs)
2		**JOSEPH PARKER** New Zealand • 36-3-0 (24 KOs)
3		**AGIT KABAYEL** Germany • 26-0-0 (18 KOs)
4		**DANIEL DUBOIS** U.K. • 22-3-0 (21 KOs)
5	▲+1	**FILIP HRGOVIC** Croatia • 19-1-0 (14 KOs)
6	▲+1	**FABIO WARDLEY** U.K. • 19-0-1 (18 KOs)
7	▲+1	**ZHILEI ZHANG** China • 27-3-1 (22 KOs)
8	▲+1	**MARTIN BAKOLE** Congo • 21-2-1 (16 KOs)
9	▲+1	**MOSES ITAUMA** U.K. • 13-0-0 (11 KOs)
10	★	**EFE AJAGBA** Nigeria • 20-1-1 (14 KOs)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 200 POUNDS

C		**JAI OPETAIA** ◆◆ Australia • 28-0-0 (22 KOs)
1		**GILBERTO RAMIREZ** ◆◆ Mexico • 48-1-0 (30 KOs)
2		**CHRIS BILLAM-SMITH** U.K. • 21-2-0 (13 KOs)
3		**MICHAL CIESLAK** Poland • 28-2-0 (22 KOs)
4		**RYAN ROZICKI** Canada • 20-1-1 (19 KOs)
5		**BADOU JACK** ◆ Sweden • 29-3-3 (17 KOs)
6		**NOEL MIKAELIAN** Armenia • 27-3-0 (12 KOs)
7		**YAMIL PERALTA** Argentina • 17-1-1 (9 KOs)
8		**LEONARDO MOSQUEA** France • 17-0-0 (10 KOs)
9		**ROBIN SIRWAN SAFAR** Sweden • 18-0-0 (13 KOs)
10		**VIDDAL RILEY** U.K. • 13-0-0 (7 KOs)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 175 POUNDS

C		**DMITRY BIVOL** ◆◆◆◆ Russia • 24-1-0 (12 KOs)
1		**ARTUR BETERBIEV** Russia • 21-1-0 (20 KOs)
2		**DAVID BENAVIDEZ** ◆ U.S. • 30-0-0 (24 KOs)
3		**CALLUM SMITH** U.K. • 31-2-0 (22 KOs)
4		**ANTHONY YARDE** U.K. • 27-3-0 (24 KOs)
5		**JOSHUA BUATSI** U.K. • 19-1-0 (13 KOs)
6		**ALBERT RAMIREZ** Venezuela • 22-0-0 (19 KOs)
7		**DAVID MORRELL** Cuba • 12-1-0 (9 KOs)
8		**IMAM KHATAEV** Australia • 10-1-0 (9 KOs)
9		**OLEKSANDR GVOZDYK** Ukraine • 21-2-0 (17 KOs)
10		**WILLY HUTCHINSON** U.K. • 18-2-0 (13 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

C	★	**TERENCE CRAWFORD** ◆◆◆◆◆ U.S. • 42-0-0 (31 KOs)
1	▼-1	**CANELO ALVAREZ** Mexico • 63-3-2 (39 KOs)
2	▲+1	**OSLEYS IGLESIAS** Cuba • 14-0-0 (13 KOs)
3	▼-2	**CHRISTIAN MBILLI** France • 29-0-1 (24 KOs)
4	★	**LESTER MARTINEZ** Guatemala • 19-0-1 (16 KOs)
5	▼-3	**DIEGO PACHECO** U.S. • 24-0-0 (18 KOs)
6	▼-2	**JOSE ARMANDO RESENDIZ** Mexico • 16-2-0 (11 KOs)
7	▼-2	**CALEB PLANT** U.S. • 23-3-0 (14 KOs)
8	▼-2	**HAMZAH SHEERAZ** U.K. • 22-0-1 (18 KOs)
9	▼-2	**BRUNO SURACE** France • 26-1-2 (5 KOs)
10	▼-2	**WILLIAM SCULL** Cuba • 23-1-0 (9 KOs)

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

C		**(VACANT)**
1		**ZHANIBEK ALIMKHANULY** ◆◆ Kazakhstan • 17-0-0 (12 KOs)
2		**CARLOS ADAMES** ◆ Dom. Rep. • 24-1-1 (18 KOs)
3	▲+1	**CHRIS EUBANK JR.** U.K. • 35-3-0 (25 KOs)
4	▲+1	**YOENLI HERNANDEZ** Cuba • 8-0-0 (7 KOs)
5	▲+1	**TROY ISLEY** U.S. • 15-0-0 (5 KOs)
6	▲+1	**ETINOSA OLIHA** Italy • 22-0-0 (10 KOs)
7	▲+1	**AARON MCKENNA** Ireland • 20-0-0 (10 KOs)
8	▲+1	**AUSTIN WILLIAMS** U.S. • 19-1-0 (13 KOs)
9	▲+1	**DENZEL BENTLEY** U.K. • 21-3-1 (17 KOs)
10	★	**MARQUIS TAYLOR** U.S. • 18-1-2 (3 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

C		**(VACANT)**
1	▲+1	**VERGIL ORTIZ** U.S. • 23-0-0 (21 KOs)
2	▲+1	**SEBASTIAN FUNDORA** ◆ U.S. • 23-1-1 (15 KOs)
3	▲+1	**ISRAIL MADRIMOV** Uzbekistan • 10-2-1 (7 KOs)
4	▲+1	**BAKHRAM MURTAZALIEV** ◆ Russia • 23-0-0 (17 KOs)
5	▲+2	**ERICKSON LUBIN** U.S. • 27-2-0 (19 KOs)
6	▲+2	**XANDER ZAYAS** ◆ Puerto Rico • 22-0-0 (13 KOs)
7	★	**BRANDON ADAMS** U.S. • 26-4-0 (16 KOs)
8	▲+1	**JESUS RAMOS** U.S. • 23-1-0 (19 KOs)
9	▲+1	**ABASS BARAOU** ◆ Germany • 17-1-0 (9 KOs)
10	▼-4	**SERHII BOHACHUK** Ukraine • 26-3-0 (24 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

C		**(VACANT)**
1		**BRIAN NORMAN JR.** ◆ U.S. • 28-0-0 (22 KOs)
2		**EIMANTAS STANIONIS** Lithuania • 15-1-0 (9 KOs)
3		**GIOVANI SANTILLAN** U.S. • 34-1-0 (18 KOs)
4		**ROHAN POLANCO** Dom. Rep. • 17-0-0 (10 KOs)
5		**SHAKHRAM GIYASOV** Uzbekistan • 17-0-0 (10 KOs)
6		**ALEXIS ROCHA** U.S. • 25-2-1 (16 KOs)
7		**RAUL CURIEL** Mexico • 16-0-1 (14 KOs)
8		**MARIO BARRIOS** ◆ U.S. • 29-2-2 (18 KOs)
9		**MANNY PACQUIAO** Philippines • 62-8-3 (39 KOs)
10		**EKOW ESSUMAN** U.K. • 22-1-0 (8 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

C		**TEOFIMO LOPEZ** ◆◆ U.S. • 22-1-0 (13 KOs)
1		**RICHARDSON HITCHINS** ◆ U.S. • 20-0-0 (8 KOs)
2		**SUBRIEL MATIAS** ◆ Puerto Rico • 23-2-0 (22 KOs)
3		**ALBERTO PUELLO** Dom. Rep. • 24-1-0 (10 KOs)
4		**ARNOLD BARBOZA** U.S. • 32-1-0 (11 KOs)
5	▲+1	**GARY ANTUANNE RUSSELL** ◆ U.S. • 18-1-0 (17 KOs)
6	▲+1	**SANDOR MARTIN** Spain • 42-4-0 (15 KOs)
7	▲+1	**DALTON SMITH** U.K. • 18-0-0 (13 KOs)
8	▲+1	**ANDY HIRAOKA** Japan • 24-0-0 (19 KOs)
9	▲+1	**LINDOLFO DELGADO** Mexico • 23-0-0 (16 KOs)
10	★	**ADAM AZIM** U.K. • 13-0-0 (10 KOs)

srmg.com

Reach 165 million people across MENA.

Covering news, entertainment, travel, business, sports and fashion, our collection of iconic media brands focus on the evolving needs of today's audiences, resulting in unparalleled access to over 165 million people across the MENA region.

Partner with SRMG, the largest integrated media group in the region, and reach your audience today.

srmg

MEN'S RING RATINGS Through Sept. 20, 2025

CHAMPIONSHIP BELTS: ◆ RING ◆ IBF ◆ WBA ◆ WBC ◆ WBO | ★ NEW TO RATINGS

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

C (VACANT)

1 SHAKUR STEVENSON ◆
U.S. • 24-0-0 (11 KOs)

2 GERVONTA DAVIS ◆
U.S. • 30-0-1 (28 KOs)

3 RAYMOND MURATALLA
U.S. • 23-0-0 (17 KOs)

4 WILLIAM ZEPEDA
Mexico • 33-1-0 (27 KOs)

5 ANDY CRUZ
Cuba • 6-0-0 (3 KOs)

6 FLOYD SCHOFIELD
U.S. • 19-0-0 (13 KOs)

7 DENYS BERINCHYK
Ukraine • 19-1-0 (9 KOs)

8 SAM NOAKES
U.K. • 17-0-0 (15 KOs)

9 ABDULLAH MASON
U.S. • 19-0-0 (17 KOs)

10 LUCAS BAHDI
Canada • 20-0-0 (15 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

C (VACANT)

1 O'SHAQUIE FOSTER ◆
U.S. • 23-3-0 (12 KOs)

2 EMANUEL NAVARRETE ◆
Mexico • 39-2-1 (32 KOs)

3 ANTHONY CACACE
Ireland • 24-1-0 (9 KOs)

4 LAMONT ROACH ◆
U.S. • 25-1-2 (10 KOs)

5 EDUARDO NUNEZ ◆
Mexico • 29-1-0 (27 KOs)

6 ROBSON CONCEICAO
Brazil • 20-3-1 (10 KOs)

7 EDUARDO HERNANDEZ
Mexico • 37-2-0 (32 KOs)

8 CHARLY SUAREZ
Philippines • 18-0-0 (10 KOs)

9 RAYMOND FORD
U.S. • 18-1-1 (8 KOs)

10 JAMES DICKENS
U.K. • 36-5-0 (15 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

C (VACANT)

1 RAFAEL ESPINOZA ◆
Mexico • 27-0-0 (23 KOs)

2 ANGELO LEO ◆
U.S. • 26-1-0 (12 KOs)

3 NICK BALL ◆
U.K. • 23-0-1 (13 KOs)

4 STEPHEN FULTON ◆
U.S. • 23-1-0 (8 KOs)

5 LUIS ALBERTO LOPEZ
Mexico • 31-3-0 (18 KOs)

6 BRUCE CARRINGTON
U.S. • 16-0-0 (9 KOs)

7 BRANDON FIGUEROA
U.S. • 26-2-1 (19 KOs)

8 MIRCO CUELLO
Argentina • 16-0-0 (13 KOs)

9 ROBEISY RAMIREZ
Cuba • 14-3-0 (9 KOs)

10 NATHANIEL COLLINS
U.K. • 17-0-0 (8 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

C NAOYA INOUE ◆◆◆◆◆
Japan • 31-0-0 (27 KOs)

1 MARLON TAPALES
Philippines • 40-4-0 (21 KOs)

2 ▲+1 **LUIS NERY**
Mexico • 36-2-0 (28 KOs)

3 ▼-1 **MURODJON AKHMADALIEV**
Uzbekistan • 14-2-0 (11 KOs)

4 SAM GOODMAN
Australia • 20-1-0 (8 KOs)

5 ALAN PICASSO
Mexico • 32-0-1 (17 KOs)

6 SHABAZ MASOUD
U.K. • 14-0-0 (4 KOs)

7 TJ DOHENY
Ireland • 26-6-0 (20 KOs)

8 RAMON CARDENAS
U.S. • 26-2-0 (14 KOs)

9 SEBASTIAN HERNANDEZ
Mexico • 20-0-0 (18 KOs)

10 SUBARU MURATA
Japan • 10-0-0 (10 KOs)

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

C (VACANT)

1 SEIYA TSUTSUMI ◆
Japan • 12-0-3 (8 KOs)

2 ★ **CHRISTIAN MEDINA** ◆
Mexico • 26-4-0 (19 KOs)

3 RYOSUKE NISHIDA
Japan • 10-1-0 (2 KOs)

4 TAKUMA INOUE
Japan • 20-2-0 (5 KOs)

5 DAIGO HIGA
Japan • 21-3-3 (19 KOs)

6 ANTONIO VARGAS
U.S. • 19-1-1 (11 KOs)

7 ▼-5 **YOSHIKI TAKEI**
Japan • 11-1-0 (9 KOs)

8 ▼-1 **TENSHIN NASUKAWA**
Japan • 7-0-0 (2 KOs)

9 ▼-1 **JASON MOLONEY**
Australia • 27-4-0 (19 KOs)

10 ▼-1 **JEYVIER CINTRON**
Puerto Rico • 13-1-0 (6 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

C JESSE RODRIGUEZ ◆◆◆
U.S. • 22-0-0 (15 KOs)

1 FERNANDO MARTINEZ ◆
Argentina • 18-0-0 (9 KOs)

2 KAZUTO IOKA
Japan • 31-4-1 (16 KOs)

3 CARLOS CUADRAS
Mexico • 44-5-1 (28 KOs)

4 DAVID JIMENEZ
Costa Rica • 18-1-0 (12 KOs)

5 PHUMELELE CAFU
S. Africa • 11-1-3 (8 KOs)

6 ANDREW MOLONEY
Australia • 27-4-0 (17 KOs)

7 ▲+1 **RICARDO MALAJIKA**
S. Africa • 16-2-0 (12 KOs)

8 ▲+1 **WILLIBALDO GARCIA**
Mexico • 23-6-2 (13 KOs)

9 ▲+1 **RENE CALIXTO BIBIANO**
Mexico • 23-1-1 (9 KOs)

10 ★ **JAYR RAQUINEL**
Philippines • 18-2-1 (14 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

C (VACANT)

1 RICARDO SANDOVAL ◆◆
U.S. • 27-2-0 (18 KOs)

2 KENSHIRO TERAJI
Japan • 25-2-0 (16 KOs)

3 SEIGO YURI AKUI
Japan • 21-3-1 (11 KOs)

4 MASAMICHI YABUKI ◆
Japan • 18-4-0 (17 KOs)

5 GALAL YAFAI
U.K. • 9-1-0 (7 KOs)

6 ▲+2 **ANTHONY OLASCUAGA** ◆
U.S. • 10-1-0 (7 KOs)

7 ▼-1 **ANGEL AYALA**
Mexico • 18-1-0 (8 KOs)

8 ▼-1 **FELIX ALVARADO**
Nicaragua • 42-4-0 (35 KOs)

9 TOBIAS REYES
Argentina • 17-1-1 (16 KOs)

10 JUKIYA IIMURA
Japan • 9-1-0 (2 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

C (VACANT)

1 CARLOS CANIZALES ◆
Venezuela • 28-3-1 (20 KOs)

2 KYOSUKE TAKAMI ◆
Japan • 10-0-0 (8 KOs)

3 RENE SANTIAGO ◆
Puerto Rico • 14-4-0 (9 KOs)

4 THANONGSAK SIMSRI
Thailand • 39-1-0 (34 KOs)

5 SIVENATHI NONTSHINGA
S. Africa • 13-2-0 (10 KOs)

6 SHOKICHI IWATA
Japan • 14-2-0 (11 KOs)

7 REGIE SUGANOB
Philippines • 16-1-0 (6 KOs)

8 CRISTIAN ARANETA
Philippines • 25-3-0 (20 KOs)

9 ERIK BADILLO
Mexico • 18-0-0 (8 KOs)

10 ★ **MASATAKA TANIGUCHI**
Japan • 21-5-0 (15 KOs)

Naoki Fukuda

MEN'S RING RATINGS Through Sept. 20, 2025

CHAMPIONSHIP BELTS: ◆ RING ◆ IBF ◆ WBA ◆ WBC ◆ WBO | ★ NEW TO RATINGS

STRAWWEIGHTS

WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

C **OSCAR COLLAZO** ◆◆◆
U.S. • 13-0-0 (10 KOs)

1 **MELVIN JERUSALEM** ◆
Philippines • 24-3-0 (12 KOs)

2 **PEDRO TADURAN** ◆
Philippines • 18-4-1 (13 KOs)

3 **KNOCKOUT CP FRESHMART**
Thailand • 28-1-0 (11 KOs)

4 **SIYAKHOLWA KUSE**
S. Africa • 9-2-1 (4 KOs)

5 ▲+1 **RYUSEI MATSUMOTO**
Japan • 7-0-0 (4 KOs)

6 ▲+1 **JOEY CANOY**
Philippines • 24-5-2 (15 KOs)

7 ▲+2 **TAKESHI ISHII**
Japan • 11-1-0 (8 KOs)

8 ▼-3 **YUNI TAKADA**
Japan • 16-9-3 (6 KOs)

9 ▼-1 **VIC SALUDAR**
Philippines • 26-6-0 (16 KOs)

10 **BEAVEN SIBANDA**
Zimbabwe • 9-1-0 (3 KOs)

HOW OUR RATINGS ARE COMPILED

RECORDS PROVIDED BY BOXREC.COM

Championship vacancies can be filled in the following two ways: 1. The Ring's Nos. 1 and 2 contenders fight one another. 2. If the Nos. 1 and 2 contenders choose not to fight one another and No. 1 fights No. 3, that matchup could be for the Ring title if the Editorial Board deems No. 3 worthy.

A champion can lose their belt in six situations: 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which they are champion; 2. The Champion moves to another weight class; 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months, although injuries and certain other unforeseen circumstances could be taken into consideration; 4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at their championship weight for 18 months (even if they fight at another weight); 5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years; 6. The Champion retires.

The Ring Editorial Board considers input from the Ratings Panel of boxing journalists from around the world and then decides collectively what changes will be made. That applies to both the pound-for-pound and divisional ratings.

POUND FOR POUND LIST

MEN

1 ▲+2 **TERENCE CRAWFORD**
U.S. • 42-0-0 (31 KOs)

2 ▼-1 **OLEKSANDR USYK**
Ukraine • 24-0-0 (15 KOs)

3 ▼-1 **NAOYA INOUE**
Japan • 31-0-0 (27 KOs)

4 **DMITRY BIVOL**
Russia • 24-1-0 (12 KOs)

5 **ARTUR BETERBIEV**
Russia • 21-1-0 (20 KOs)

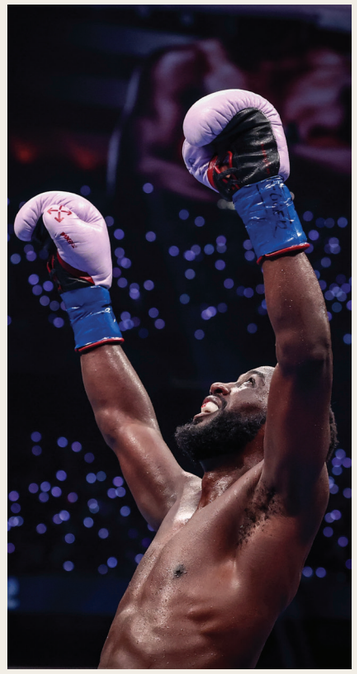
6 **JESSE RODRIGUEZ**
U.S. • 22-0-0 (15 KOs)

7 **JUNTO NAKATANI**
Japan • 31-0-0 (24 KOs)

8 ▲+1 **SHAKUR STEVENSON**
U.S. • 24-0-0 (11 KOs)

9 ▲+1 **DAVID BENAVIDEZ**
U.S. • 30-0-0 (24 KOs)

10 ▼-2 **CANELO ALVAREZ**
Mexico • 63-3-2 (39 KOs)



Bud Crawford has reclaimed his place as the best fighter in the world.

WOMEN

1 **KATIE TAYLOR**
Ireland • 25-1-0 (6 KOs)

2 **CLARESSA SHIELDS**
U.S. • 17-0-0 (3 KOs)

3 **CHANTELLE CAMERON**
U.K. • 21-1-0 (8 KOs)

4 **AMANDA SERRANO**
Puerto Rico • 47-4-1 (31 KOs)

5 **DINA THORSLUND**
Denmark • 23-0-0 (9 KOs)

6 **GABRIELA FUNDORA**
U.S. • 17-0-0 (9 KOs)

7 **LAUREN PRICE**
U.K. • 9-0-0 (2 KOs)

8 **YOKASTA VALLE**
Costa Rica • 33-3-0 (10 KOs)

9 **MIKAELA MAYER**
U.S. • 21-2-0 (5 KOs)

10 **TINA RUPPRECHT**
Germany • 15-1-1 (3 KOs)

Saudia SKYTEAM

Fly Saudia
to the world

Ed Mulholland

WOMEN'S RING RATINGS Through Sept. 20, 2025

CHAMPIONSHIP BELTS: ◆RING ◆IBF ◆WBA ◆WBC ◆WBO | ★ NEW TO RATINGS

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

C SHADASIA GREEN ◆◆◆
U.S. • 16-1-0 (11 KOs)
1 FRANCHON CREWS-DEZURN ◆◆
U.S. • 10-2-0 (2 KOs)
2 SAVANNAH MARSHALL
U.K. • 13-2-0 (10 KOs)
3 LANI DANIELS
New Zealand • 11-3-2 (1 KO)
4 MARY CASAMASSA
U.S. • 6-1-0 (1 KO)
5 CITLALLI ORTIZ
Mexico • 4-2-0 (1 KO)

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

C (VACANT)
1 DESLEY ROBINSON ◆◆
Australia • 10-3-0 (3 KOs)
2 MELINDA WATPOOL
Canada • 7-1-0 (2 KOs)
3 MAPULE NGUBANE
S. Africa • 14-9-3 (3 KOs)
4 ADRIANA DOS SANTOS ARAUJO
Brazil • 6-3-0 (1 KO)
5 TAMM THIBEAULT
Canada • 3-0-0 (2 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

C. (VACANT)
1 OSHAE JONES ◆
U.S. • 9-0-0 (3 KOs)
2 CECILIA BRAEKHUS
Norway • 38-2-1 (9 KOs)
3 FEMKE HERMANS
Belgium • 18-5-0 (7 KOs)
4 MARY SPENCER ◆
Canada • 10-2-0 (6 KOs)
5 PRISCILLA PETERLE
France • 11-0-0 (3 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

C LAUREN PRICE ◆◆◆◆
U.K. • 9-0-0 (2 KO)
1 MIKAELA MAYER ◆
U.S. • 21-2-0 (5 KOs)
2 ▲+1 **SANDY RYAN**
U.K. • 8-3-1 (3 KOs)
3 ▼-1 **NATASHA JONAS**
U.K. • 16-3-1 (9 KOs)
4 ▲+1 **STEPHANIE AQUINO**
Puerto Rico • 9-0-0 (3 KOs)
5 ▼-1 **MICHAELA KOTASKOVA**
Czech Rep. • 11-0-2 (4 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

C KATIE TAYLOR ◆◆◆◆
Ireland • 25-1-0 (6 KOs)
1 CHANTELLE CAMERON
U.K. • 21-1-0 (8 KOs)
2 AMANDA SERRANO
Puerto Rico • 47-4-1 (31 KOs)
3 SAMANTHA WORTHINGTON
U.S. • 12-0-0 (7 KOs)
4 FLORA PILI
France • 11-0-0 (2 KOs)
5 ELIZABETH OSHOBA
Nigeria • 9-0-0 (5 KOs)

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

C. (VACANT)
1 CAROLINE DUBOIS ◆
U.K. • 11-0-1 (5 KOs)
2 BEATRIZ FERREIRA ◆
Brazil • 7-0-0 (2 KOs)
3 TERRI HARPER ◆
U.K. • 16-2-2 (6 KOs)
4 RHIANNON DIXON
U.K. • 10-1-0 (1 KO)
5 HOLLY HOLM
U.S. • 34-2-3 (9 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

C ALYCIA BAUMGARDNER ◆◆◆◆
U.S. • 16-1-0 (7 KOs)
1 LEILA BEAUDOIN
Canada • 13-1-0 (2 KOs)
2 DELFINE PERSOON
Belgium • 50-3-0 (20 KOs)
3 JENNIFER MIRANDA
Spain • 12-1-0 (1 KO)
4 MEA MOTU
New Zealand • 22-1-0 (9 KOs)
5 ELIF NUR TURHAN
Turkiye • 11-0-0 (7 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

C AMANDA SERRANO ◆◆◆
Puerto Rico • 47-4-1 (31 KOs)
1 TIARA BROWN ◆
U.S. • 20-0-0 (11 KOs)
2 NINA MEINKE ◆
German • 20-3-0 (4 KOs)
3 SKYE NICOLSON
Australia • 14-1-0 (3 KOs)
4 SARAH MAHFOUD
Denmark • 15-2-0 (3 KOs)
5 DANIELA BERMUDEZ
Argentina • 32-6-3 (12 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

C ELLIE SCOTNEY ◆◆◆◆
U.K. • 11-0-0 (0 KOs)
1 YAMILETH MERCADO
Mexico • 24-4-0 (5 KOs)
2 SEGOLENE LEFEBVRE
France • 19-1-0 (1 KO)
3 MAYELLI FLORES ROSQUERO ◆
Mexico • 13-1-1 (4 KOs)
4 ERIKA CRUZ-HERNANDEZ
Mexico • 18-2-1 (4 KOs)
5 NAZARENA ROMERO
Argentina • 14-1-2 (8 KOs)

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

C DINA THORSLUND ◆
Denmark • 23-0-0 (9 KOs)
1 CHERNEKA JOHNSON ◆◆◆◆
Australia • 18-2-0 (8 KOs)
2 DIANA LAURA FERNANDEZ
Mexico • 35-4-1 (5 KOs)
3 SHURRETTA METCALF
U.S. • 14-5-1 (2 KOs)
4 FLORENCIA JUAREZ
Argentina • 13-1-0 (1 KO)
5 JOHANNA WONYOU
France • 12-0-0 (2 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

C MIZUKI HIRUTA ◆◆
Japan • 9-0-0 (2 KOs)
1 GINNY FUCHS
U.S. • 4-0-0 (1 KO)
2 ADELAIDA RUIZ
U.S. • 17-1-1 (8 KOs)
3 ASLEY GONZALEZ ◆
Mexico • 17-2-0 (7 KOs)
4 CARLA MERINO
Argentina • 16-3-0 (4 KOs)
5 EMMA DOLAN
U.K. • 8-0-0 (1 KO)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

C GABRIELA FUNDORA ◆◆◆◆◆
U.S. • 17-0-0 (9 KOs)
1 KENIA ENRIQUEZ
Mexico • 28-1-0 (11 KOs)
2 ARELY MUCINO
Mexico • 32-5-2 (11 KOs)
3 JASMINA ZAPOTOCZNA
U.K. • 9-1-0 (0 KOs)
4 MARILYN BADILLO AMAYA
Mexico • 19-1-1 (3 KOs)
5 ★ ADRIANA THALIA PINEIRO
Uruguay • 9-0-0 (1 KO)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

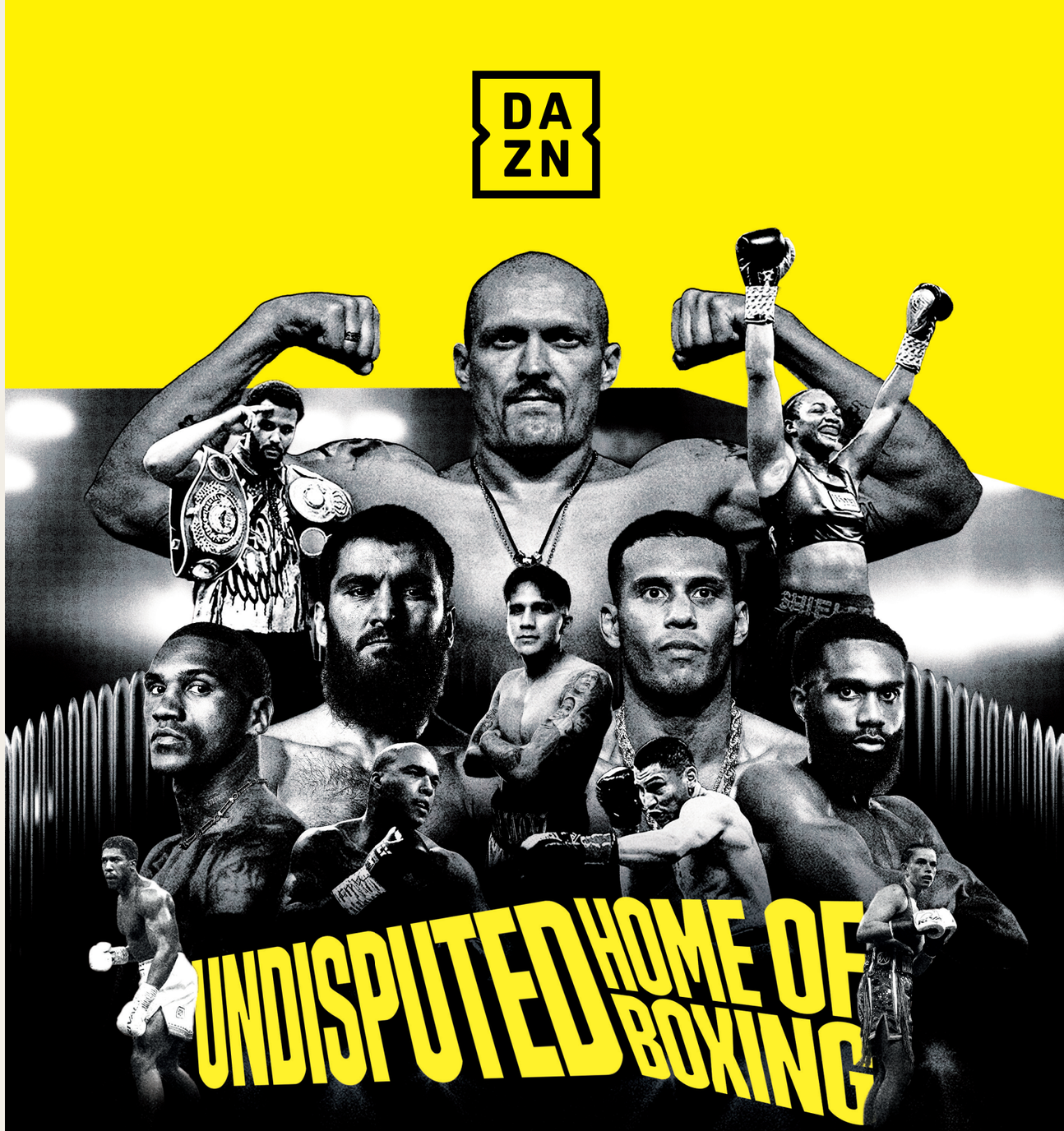
C (VACANT)
1 EVELIN BERMUDEZ ◆◆◆
Argentina • 22-1-1 (8 KOs)
2 KIM CLAVEL
Canada • 21-2-0 (3 KOs)
3 LOURDES JUAREZ ◆
Mexico • 38-4-0 (5 KOs)
4 GABRIELA ALANIZ
Argentina • 17-2-0 (7 KOS)
5 SARA BAILEY
Canada • 6-1-0 (0 KOs)

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

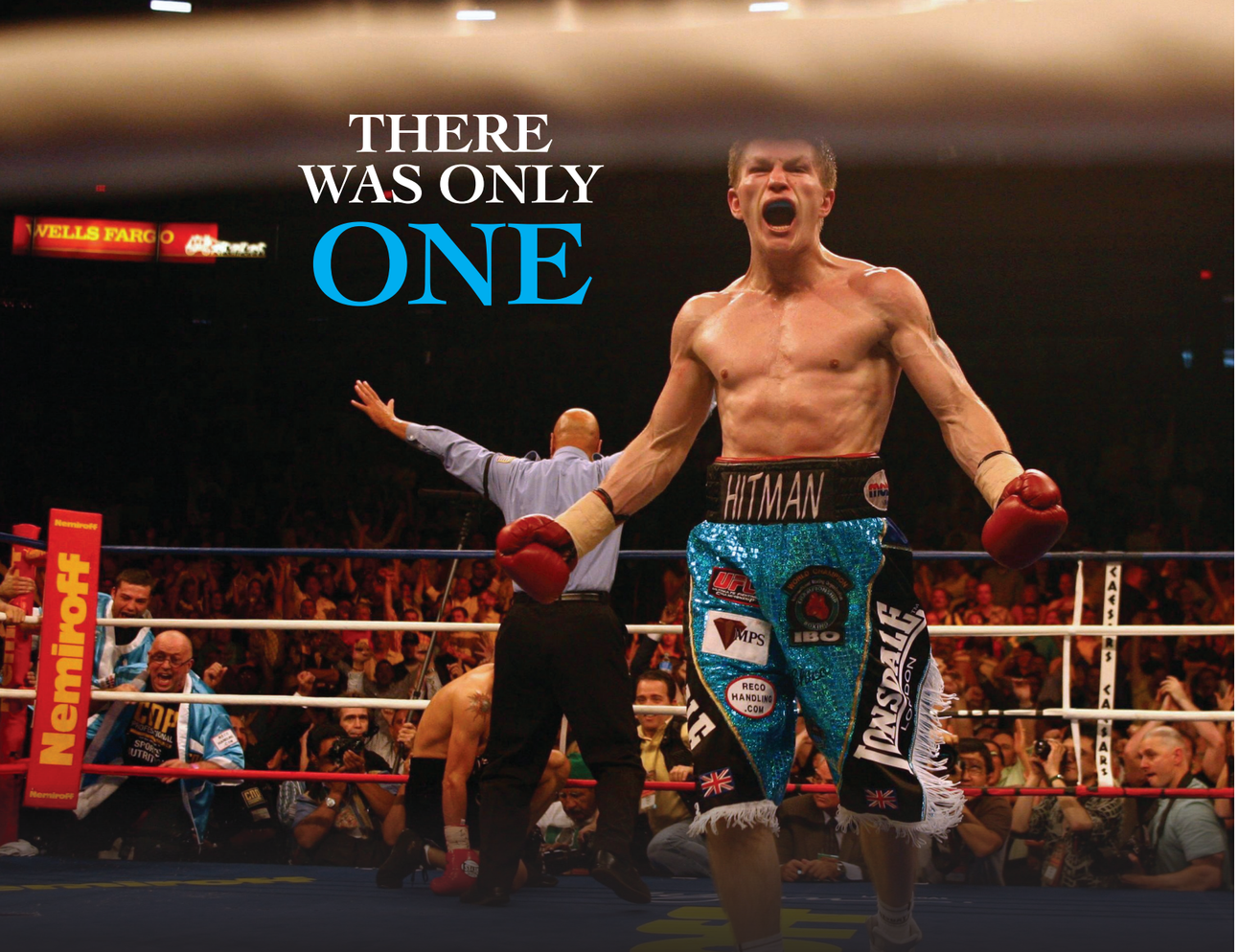
C (VACANT)
1 YOKASTA VALLE ◆
Costa Rica • 33-3-0 (10 KOs)
2 SARAH BORMANN ◆
Germany • 20-1-0 (7 KOs)
3 YUKO KUROKI ◆
Japan • 25-8-2 (10 KOs)
4 SOL CUDOS ◆
Argentina • 10-0-2 (3 KOs)
5 SOL BAUMSTARH
Argentina • 13-7-1 (8 KOs)

ATOMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 102 POUNDS

C TINA RUPPRECHT ◆◆◆◆◆
Germany • 15-1-1 (3 KOs)
1 SUMIRE YAMANAKA
Japan • 8-1-0 (3 KOs)
2 ERI MATSUDA
Japan • 8-2-1 (1 KO)
3 ESNEIDY RODRIGUEZ OLMOS
Mexico • 10-0-1 (0 KOs)
4 CAMILA ZAMORANO
Mexico • 12-0-0 (1 KO)
5 NAO UGAWA
Japan • 6-0-0 (0 KOs)



185+ unmissable fights a year
The biggest names. The best promoters. All in one place.
Sign up at DAZN.com



THERE WAS ONLY ONE

RICKY HATTON WILL FOREVER BE REMEMBERED AS THE QUINTESSENTIAL PEOPLE'S CHAMPION WHO FOUGHT AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL WHILE NEVER ABANDONING HIS ROOTS

By Gareth A Davies

The people's champion, Ricky Hatton, the fighter and the consummate entertainer, entered into his eternal second too early at the age of 46, leaving memories and sadness for millions of fans and an enormous legacy as a sports star of British society. Gone is Ricky, leaving the echoes of chants from great nights, leaving memories of friendships as much as the fights, as much as the fight weeks, the endless stories and the famous drinking sessions afterward.

It encompassed so many features, Hatton's journey across the world. A journey toward greatness. We were all devastated to learn that Ricky had died alone, at home. But Ricky Hatton will never walk alone. "Blue Moon" – his walkout song and the anthem of his beloved Manchester City – and his legions of supporters will always be there with him, in spirit, in the bars, and chanting his name. Just as they did, memorably, singing his name along the Las Vegas Strip, even after Hatton had lost to Floyd Mayweather Jr. in 2007 and Manny Pacquiao in 2009.

They sang "There's only one Ricky Hatton" and of the "Hatton Wonderland." And it is fair to say that no one else comes close in popularity or adoration from the British boxing community in the last half-century. Ricky is arguably the most popular boxer Britain has ever had.

So many of us felt as if we had lost a best friend Sunday, September 14, upon learning of Ricky's tragic passing. Millions of us. That's what Ricky, the one and only Ricky Hatton, made you feel like. He made everyone he knew feel special.

Before getting into his outstanding, decorated career at junior welterweight and welterweight across 48 fights, the importance of the man himself resonates just as powerfully. This was a man of the people, a man with world title belts, fame and riches, who never, ever forgot his roots. Ever. He was one of us.

That was reflected in the many, many tributes to his life in the days that followed. Not surprising, either. It always gladdened your heart to see Ricky, during his prime years and after his career, to be with him, to be around him. Funny man. Always making you laugh. Ready, always, to have a pint with you; regale you with stories; make you roar with laughter. And grin at you, delighted that he was entertaining you.

Ricky Hatton reached fame and fortune as a brilliant fighter meeting the pound-for-pound leaders of his day. One night against Kostya Tszyu in Manchester propelled the "little lad from a council estate" (as Hatton often referred to himself, self-effacingly) to an American journey at a time when it was a prerequisite to being "great," to cross The Pond and conquer the U.S. market. After being perfectly promoted by Frank Warren in the U.K., he traversed the Atlantic under promoter Dennis Hobson, accompanied by trainer Billy Graham, strength and conditioner Kerry Kayes and an ever-growing multitude of frenzied fans.

They loved the ex-carpet fitter's fighting style (his father, Ray, said Ricky was so poor as a fitter that it was a good thing he could box), and they loved drinking with Hatton afterward. And how Ricky indulged them, being among them.

Hatton, whose pallid face cut and marked easily, had earned his stripes in the U.K. Known variously as The Hitman, The Manchester Mexican, The Pride of Hyde, Ricky "Fatton" and eventually The People's Champion, Hatton won the vacant British title against Jon Thaxton in October 2000, overcoming a bad cut over his left eye in the opening round to win on points.

Three years earlier, Hatton had made his professional debut against Colin McAuley in the prosaic setting of Kingsway Leisure Centre in Widnes. I was there that night, having been told by Warren that he had a rising star on his hands. Hatton won by a technical knockout in the first round. His second fight signaled bigger times ahead when he boxed at Madison Square Garden on the undercard of that thriller between Prince Naseem Hamed and Kevin Kelley.

Ricky made the lesser World Boxing Union belt his own with a stoppage of Tony Pep in the fourth round, then made 15 defenses with notable performances against Eamonn Magee, having been put down early in the fight, and later Ben Tackie and Ray Oliveira. By then, with 38 fights undefeated and seven years as a professional under his belt, Hatton was matched against dangerous puncher and top five pound-for-pound fighter Tszyu, a naturalized Australian from Russia who was the decided favorite. It was to be a halcyon moment. For Hatton, for Manchester, and for British boxing.

On June 5, 2005, on one of the greatest nights in modern British boxing history, Hatton defeated Tszyu, the Ring/IBF junior welterweight champion, by TKO. After relentless attacks, the Australian retired on his stool before the 12th round began. Ricky later told me that it was his "Everest," and it propelled him to widespread acclaim.

He sold out venues again and again. Every time, Ricky's presence turned it into a boxing festival, a great celebration. All because the fans loved him.

What followed the Tszyu triumph were huge nights in the USA – in Las Vegas, a quintet of contests, including famous fight weeks leading to Mayweather and Pacquiao. It made Ricky a modern icon in British boxing, with those grunting body shots, a relentless machine in the ring. But outside the ring, Ricky did not have a bad bone in his body, and he never lost the common touch.

The memories of Hatton are deep and intense. There was always access. He brought celebrity into his fight nights: the footballer Wayne Rooney, Liam and Noel Gallagher (front men of Oasis), who all carried Hatton's belts on the night he landed the perfect body punch against Jose Luis Castillo in Sin City. The stars became Ricky's mates. As did so many boxers. He truly inspired a generation. There was a beautiful tribute from Roberto Duran, Ricky's hero: "My dear Ricky Hatton, it pains me deeply to learn of your passing. You were always a gentleman and a great person. I enjoyed all your fights, and I remember as if it were yesterday the day I welcomed you at the Panama airport and took you everywhere," Duran wrote. "I will remember those moments, your

friendship, and the honor of having called you a friend. To your beloved family, I send my deepest condolences. I share their grief because Ricky was more than a great champion; he was a true brother. May God have you in his glory. Forever my champion. Hands of Stone."

We all cried when we heard that Ricky was gone. Gone too soon, but beset by mental health issues. He was always fighting those demons, once his career was over. That's what made it so emotional for so many of us who knew him, because he was open about struggling mentally, too. The inner torment was there.

But so many memories remain. When he came out in front of 58,000 fans in the Ricky Fatton suit to fight Juan Lazcano at Manchester City's football stadium. Because Ricky never took himself too seriously, and his ego never ran riot. In fact, I cannot recall him ever raising his voice – about anything.

Famously, there were 25,000 British fans in Vegas for his night in 2007 when he fought pound-for-pound king Mayweather – both of them unbeaten, of course – and Las Vegans have never forgotten the singing, the support, and that the British boxing tourists reportedly drank the bars dry, leaving a legacy in the Mojave Desert.

Ricky was a giver, a person-pleaser, and a fan-pleaser in his fights. That is why so many people offered beautiful tributes to him. Frank Warren, Amir Khan, Frank Bruno, Anthony Joshua, Andre Ward, Roy Jones Jr. and many, many others. Everyone had a story about him – all heartwarming.

Reading through so many of them, it just brought tears to your eyes again and again, because no one was able to stop Ricky from leaving this life – far, far too early. Hatton was bright-eyed, humble and friendly at the start of his career. And Ricky never changed. Even a few weeks ago, talking to him about his current crop of fighters, he was still an advocate of the sport that defined him in so many of our eyes. We all have so many memories of Ricky.

I recall one day with him filming a series with DAZN, where we rewatched his Mayweather fight together, and he returned to that night, still convinced he might have had more success against Floyd had referee Joe Cortez not stepped in time and again to halt Hatton's bulldozing fighting skills. It irked him. I even had to wear the body protector that day, and he doubled me up with a punch to the midsection, to much laughter.

Hatton's beloved team, Manchester City, paid tribute to the ex-champ.

But in truth, Ricky was hit hard by that defeat to Mayweather, and by the loss to Pacquiao in 2009. When Ricky made a comeback in 2012, against Ukrainian Vyacheslav Senchenko, he was stopped by a left-hook body shot in the ninth round and admitted honestly afterward that there was nothing left of his former bullish brilliance.

In the hours after we all learned that Ricky had gone, our thoughts were for his family, his loved ones, his children and grandchildren. His parents. So many memories ... going back in time, memories of being with him in the converted gym that was once a hat factory in Hyde, where he would be pounding the body protector worn by Graham. After the workout, we would sit in Graham's heated "office" at the back, a giant iguana walking past our heads on the back of a sofa we were sitting on ... crammed in there with Ricky telling stories that made great copy for the fights ahead. I recall being invited to attend a visit from Muhammad Ali – yes, The Greatest – who came to Ricky's gym to see him post-career. After Ali had gone, Ricky and Paul Speak – "Speaky," the ex-policeman who was his ever-present manager for as long as I can remember – were like little kids who had just unwrapped their greatest Christmas present.

The popular hero, our hero, Ricky Hatton's laughter will echo forever through those who knew him, who followed him, who adored him. RIP Ricky. You were so special. One of a kind. And you will never be forgotten. RING

Gareth A Davies is boxing correspondent for The London Telegraph and Talksport.

Sail With AROYA
Discover Our Seasons
MEDITERRANEAN SEA SEASON
RED SEA SEASON
ARABIAN GULF SEASON
BOOK NOW
+966 920022277
AROYA.COM
AROYA CRUISES

The Man Who Fought Them All

OFTEN UNDER-APPRECIATED, JOE BUGNER MADE HIS MARK DURING A HEAVYWEIGHT GOLDEN ERA

By Lee Groves

"I came from Hungary as a six-year-old peasant with nothing, but became world champion. And that little boy who walked out of Hungary is still within me. I don't take anything for granted, and when I think of all I have seen and done, I feel I am a lucky man."

These words graced the inside cover of Joe Bugner's 2013 book, *Joe Bugner: My Story*, and on September 1, the man who fought 83 times over a 31-year career died at 75 at an assisted living facility in Brisbane, Australia, where he'd resided since being diagnosed with dementia.

He was born Jozsef Kreul Bugner in Szoreg, Hungary, on March 13, 1950, but a significant portion of his youth was spent displaced. He and his family fled his Soviet-occupied birth nation to Yugoslavia when he was a child and spent approximately 18 months in a refugee camp. They then migrated to England and eventually settled into a three-story house in Bedford. His mother, who was abandoned by Joe's birth father, remarried and life appeared to stabilize, especially after Bugner learned to speak English and adjusted to his new country's traditions.

By his teens, Bugner had grown to 6 feet 2 inches, and his athleticism was such that he was a three-time national schoolboy discus champion. He was first exposed to boxing at age 13, and by 16, he was selected to compete internationally as a member of England's under-18 team. After returning home and passing an entry test to secure an apprenticeship as a fitter and turner on nuclear submarines, a co-worker who recognized his boxing talent advised him to bypass this "real job" and become a full-time boxer.

Bugner entered the pro ring in December 1967 following a 13-3 amateur career, and the overconfident 17-year-old was stopped in three rounds by the 1-3 Paul Brown. Bugner rebounded six weeks later with a two-round TKO of Paul Cassidy, the first entry in what would become an 18-fight winning streak that included two KOs over Brown. An eight-round referee's decision loss to 41-fight veteran Dick Hall stalled his progress, but the following 13-0-1 stretch that included wins over Manuel Ramos, Ray Patterson (Floyd Patterson's younger brother), Brian London and Chuck Wepner earned Bugner an opportunity to fight Henry Cooper, who held the British, Commonwealth and European championships.

At 36, "Our 'Enry" was a godlike figure to the British public and press, and both factions turned heavily against the 21-year-old Bugner after referee Harry Gibbs, the lone scoring official, declared him the winner by the narrowest of margins under England's fractional scoring system: 73¾ to 73½. Worse yet for Bugner, Cooper never fought again, and though Bugner said in his book he offered Cooper a rematch on three occasions, Cooper stuck by his decision. The two men publicly resolved their differences in 2008, three years before Cooper's death at age 76.

Evening Standard

Bugner cleaned up domestically before targeting the world's best.

"It would have been terrible for either of us to pass away without letting bygones be bygones," Bugner said upon Cooper's passing. "Life is too short. And hell, we certainly did give people their money's worth."

Bugner lost the trifecta of titles to veteran southpaw Jack Bodell two fights later, but a subsequent nine-fight winning streak between March 1972 and January 1973 earned Bugner a fight against former heavyweight champion Muhammad Ali, who had assembled his own string of nine victories after his legendary loss to Joe Frazier. The two originally met in 1969, when Bugner helped Ali prepare for his return from exile, and while the pair formed a friendship, those feelings were put aside during their February 1973 match in Las Vegas. It was only Bugner's second fight on U.S. soil (he won a 10-round decision over Mike Boswell in Houston on the Ali-Buster Mathis undercard), and he acquitted himself so well in losing the 12-round decision that he even won over the often-critical Howard Cosell.

Bugner met the freshly-dethroned Joe Frazier in London less than five months later, and "Smokin' Joe's" 10th-round knockdown helped him earn the 59¼-58½ nod from referee Gibbs. In a 2013 interview with The Ring, Bugner called Frazier "the most vicious fighter of that era," saying the punishment he suffered was "the closest thing to dying I had ever experienced," something Ali would also say of Frazier after "The Thrilla in Manila."

Bugner bounced back by winning his next eight fights, including triumphs over Mac Foster, Jose Luis Garcia and former titleholder Jimmy Ellis. That success earned him what would be his only crack at a widely recognized heavyweight championship: On June 30, 1975, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, he met Ali for the second time, and Bugner's unsensational effort in losing a unanimous decision, which he blamed on the torrid heat and humidity as well as the pressure of the moment, drew heavy rebuke from British media.

"Any fighter given the rare opportunity to bear the most prized crown in sport should be prepared to die in the attempt," wrote The Sun's Colin Hart. "Going out with a flourish is better than finishing a flop."

The scorn so deeply hurt Bugner's then-wife, Melody, that she wanted to move to America. In 1977, he left England for good and, after a few detours, settled in Australia. While he continued to fight in the U.K., he billed himself as "Aussie Joe," a chasm that was heavily exploited when he faced British hero Frank Bruno in October 1987. Bugner, now 37, was stopped in the eighth, a result that prompted an eight-year retirement.

He returned in 1995 at 45 and won the Australian heavyweight title against Vince Cervi, then competed for nearly four more years, winning the lightly-regarded WBF belt in his next-to-last fight when 45-year-old James "Bonecrusher" Smith withdrew after Round 1 due to a shoulder injury. Bugner retired in June 1999 with a 69-13-1 (41 KOs) record following a ninth-round disqualification win over Levi Billups.

The depth and breadth of Bugner's record was extraordinary. In addition to those already named, Bugner faced Greg Page, David Bey, James Tillis, Steffen Tangstad, Anders Eklund, Marvis Frazier, Earnie Shavers, Ron Lyle, Richard Dunn, Rudi Lubbers and Jurgen Blin (twice). In addition to England, Malaysia, Australia and the U.S., he fought in Germany, Denmark, Italy and Ireland.

Bugner's verbal skills and charisma were such that he starred in movies, TV series and reality shows, including The Contender: Australia, but he will be best remembered for his role in arguably the deepest heavyweight era in boxing history. RING

Lee Groves is a boxing writer and historian based in Friendly, West Virginia. He is the author of Tales from the Vault: A Celebration of 100 Boxing Closet Classics and the co-author of Muhammad Ali: By the Numbers. You can contact him via email at l.groves@frontier.com or send him a message via Facebook and X (@leegrovesboxing).

EVEN COMPARED TO THE AUDACIOUS FEATS OF PAST FIGHTERS WHO JUMPED DIVISIONS TO CHALLENGE BIGGER MEN, **TERENCE CRAWFORD'S** VICTORY OVER CANELO ALVAREZ IS A STAGGERING ACHIEVEMENT

by Don Stradley

THE WEIGHT OF HISTORY

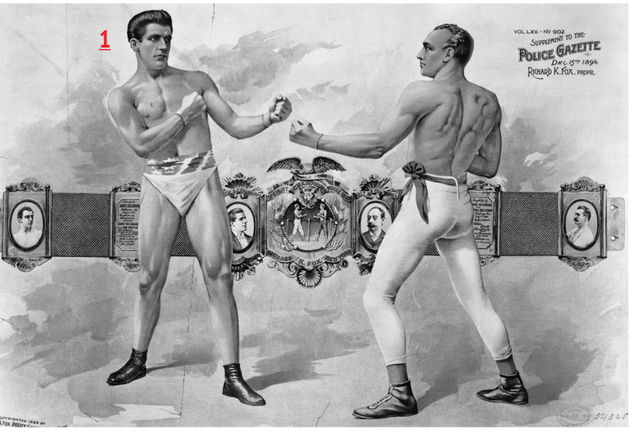
The echo of the final bell had barely faded at Allegiant Stadium when a large segment of boxing fans began hailing Terence Crawford as the greatest fighter of all time. As their heads hit their pillows, their minds filled with visions of Crawford handing out terrific beatings to Joe Louis and Jack Dempsey in the same night. Such was the impressiveness of his performance against Saul "Canelo" Alvarez, himself a legendary figure who has long been boxing's brightest light, and such is the almost childlike level of hero worship that infects many boxing observers. Crawford now sits where Vasiliy Lomachenko and Oleksandr Usyk have sat in recent times, like a caped figure high atop the Marvel or DC universe, a subject of pure wonder.

By now, the reverence for Crawford finally matches the greatness he has shown in the ring time and again, a greatness that has sometimes been strangely undervalued. Though ESPN and the Boxing Writers Association of America recognized him as such in the distant past, he has never won The Ring's Fighter of the Year Award, and his pay-per-view fights, aside from his 2023 bout with Errol Spence Jr., have been financial disappointments. In a world where Tyson Fury could lead audience singalongs or appear at press gatherings dressed as Batman, the mild-mannered Terence "Bud" Crawford seemed destined to remain a cultish figure. Until now, of course.

Perhaps even more exciting than the news of Crawford's win over Alvarez was the announcement from Netflix that 41.4 million viewers had seen the bout. Even if, as many will say, Netflix's method of tracking viewers is unreliable, the fact that so many were watching is a good sign for the future. The 108 million global live views for the Mike Tyson-Jake Paul fight on Netflix last year was more about the public's gullibility than an indication of boxing interest. The 41 million viewers for Alvarez-Crawford, however, might be viewed as a landmark of sorts, a milestone for the 21st century, an indicator that people are interested in a real championship fight. The question now is whether that 41 million will come back for more.

What did those Netflix viewers think of Crawford? Were they hyperventilating at the end of the fight, like Teddy Atlas ("That's the sweet science!!!"), or were they simply happy to have seen a pretty good boxing match, a fine display of ring technique and a veteran performer finally getting his due? Well, if they weren't amazed, they should've been.

What Crawford did on September 13 in Las Vegas, jumping two weight classes to knock off the game's biggest star, was a rare happening in boxing, and only a handful of events from the past can compare. Let's look at some and see how Crawford's win stacks up.



1

2

3

4

1 \ Bob Fitzsimmons vs. James J. Corbett, 1897

Sorry to shove you into the time machine to discuss some ancient boxing lore, but this one merits a look. Fitzsimmons, the Cornishman, was a spindly-legged middleweight champion who was already considered old at 34. Having cleaned up his division and seeking greater rewards, he resigned as middleweight ruler and came up to challenge heavyweight champion James J. Corbett. Spotting "Gentleman Jim" 17 pounds or so and suffering under the scalding sun in Carson City, Fitzsimmons scored a 14th-round knockout and won the title. The fight was mostly remembered for the way Fitz ended it – with a wicked shot to the torso that became known as "the solar plexus punch." The winning blow left Corbett on the canvas, gasping for air, unable to beat the 10 count.

It was a major sporting event in its day, and the result was considered something of a surprise. It also elevated Fitzsimmons in the eyes of the public.

How does it compare to Crawford's win? The big difference is that Crawford dominated Alvarez, whereas Corbett had outboxed Fitzsimmons most of the way. One Nevada newspaper reported that Fitzsimmons, by the bout's end, was "covered in blood from head to foot." We'll bet Fitz would've preferred the seemingly easier time that Crawford enjoyed against Alvarez.

2 \ Mickey Walker vs. Jack Sharkey, 1931

If your great-grandfather were still alive and cared to discuss such points, he might regale you with tales of Mickey Walker, a fighter from a century ago who did his best work at welterweight and middleweight but had the temerity to wage war in the heavyweight division. He notched a few wins over such fringe sluggers as Bearcat Wright and Johnny Risko, but the best was yet to come.

On July 22, 1931, before a roaring audience of 25,000 at Ebbets Field in Brooklyn, Walker held perennial contender and future champion Jack Sharkey to a 15-round draw. Giving up nearly 30 pounds in weight and a few inches in height, lionhearted Mickey certainly won on the fans' scorecard, nearly putting Sharkey down in the 11th and battling him hard throughout the contest. Yet Sharkey managed to cut Walker and make him bleed, which may have swung some rounds his way.

As far as smaller fighters taking on bigger ones, few did so with the aplomb of Walker, the "Toy Bulldog."

But as great as Walker was in his heavyweight adventure against Sharkey, it was still a draw, not a win. And unlike Canelo, Sharkey wasn't exactly the day's big attraction. Walker, in fact, was probably the bigger star.

3 \ Henry Armstrong vs. Barney Ross, 1938

If any fight matched the magnitude of Crawford's win over Alvarez, it may have happened on May 31, 1938, when featherweight champion Henry Armstrong challenged welterweight champion Barney Ross before 30,000 fans at Madison Square Garden's Long Island Bowl. As beloved among American Jews as Alvarez is among Mexicans, Ross was every bit the living legend, entering the fight with a record of 74-3-3, with wins over the best lightweights and welterweights of the era. By fight night he was an 8-5 betting favorite over Armstrong.

Weighing in almost 14 pounds below the welterweight limit, Armstrong battered his way to a 15-round decision, so violently dominating Ross that he allegedly carried the fading champion for the last few rounds rather than cause him the embarrassment of a knockout. It was a performance for the ages, the lead sports story in all the New York papers, accompanied by gigantic photographs worthy of an epoch-making event.

Frankly, with Time magazine calling it "one of the most brutal beatings in the history of the prize ring," we have to say Armstrong put more hurt on Ross than Crawford laid on Alvarez. Additionally, by today's breakdown of weight divisions, Armstrong had jumped four classes.

4 \ Michael Spinks vs. Larry Holmes, 1985

Light heavyweight champion Spinks leaped clear over the relatively new cruiserweight class to get at heavyweight champion Holmes in September 1985. By winning a 15-round decision and the Ring and IBF belts, Spinks made some history by becoming the first light heavyweight titlist to successfully challenge for the heavyweight championship, succeeding where others had failed.

But while the fight was significant in its way, it falls short of Crawford's win over Alvarez, mainly because it was a close contest. Spinks' hunting-and-pecking method of winning rounds doesn't compare to Crawford's beautiful display of boxing.

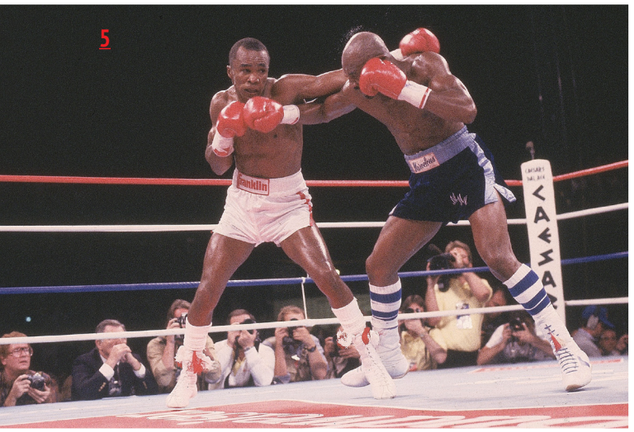
5 \ Sugar Ray Leonard vs. Marvelous Marvin Hagler, 1987

To refresh your memories, Leonard had fought only once since undergoing retinal surgery in 1982, and most predicted Hagler would either kill him or leave him half-blind. Leonard,

who had fought at 154 but was primarily a welterweight, was challenging one of the fiercest middleweight champions of all time.

A big difference between Hagler-Leonard and Alvarez-Crawford is that hardly anyone gave Leonard a chance. Conversely, Crawford had many supporters who thought he could win. The betting odds in 1987 had initially favored Hagler 4-1, while Alvarez started as a 2-1 favorite over Crawford. Despite the talk of Crawford challenging a naturally bigger fellow, there was no sign at the betting windows that he was doomed. Leonard? People were praying for his safety.

"This match endangers the eyesight of Leonard, as well


5

6

7

8

as his life," said Ferdie Pacheco, by then a fight analyst for NBC, "and makes a mockery of the credibility of any boxing commission that sanctions it." Frank Deford of Sports Illustrated dubbed the fight, "The Blinding of Sugar Ray." Such was the concern over Leonard as he prepared to face Hagler. Yet Leonard proved the pessimists wrong by boxing a smart, tactical fight and taking a 12-round split decision.

But as mind-bending as Leonard's achievement was, Hagler was competitive and won enough rounds that many found fault with the scoring.

No such controversy marred Crawford's win. If the scoring was questioned, it was because the two 115-113 scorecards didn't reflect Crawford's mastery.

6 \ Sugar Shane Mosley vs. Oscar De La Hoya, 2000

Maybe Shane Mosley knows something of what Crawford accomplished, having once jumped a weight class to take on – and defeat – the biggest name in the business, Oscar De La Hoya.

Mosley, who had been a longtime IBF lightweight titleholder, earned a hard-fought 12-round split decision over De La Hoya on June 17, 2000, at Staples Center in Los Angeles, taking Oscar's WBC welterweight title in the process.

Maybe there were not as many belts on the line, but one could argue that De La Hoya was an even bigger star than Alvarez at the time, especially in the United States, where he'd become a mainstream celebrity.

Still, Crawford's win over Alvarez is more impressive, for not only did he more thoroughly dominate Canelo, but he'd never fought at 168 before (much less 160). Prior to facing De La Hoya, Mosley tested the welterweight waters with KO wins over Wilfredo Rivera and Willy Wise. Crawford didn't test the waters. He dove into the deep end of the ocean, a knife in his teeth, ready for the sharks.

7 \ Roy Jones Jr. vs. John Ruiz, 2003

When Roy Jones Jr., a former middleweight titlist who'd been ruling the light heavyweight division for the past six years, stepped up to heavyweight in 2003 to dethrone WBA titleholder John Ruiz by a lopsided 12-round decision, there was an immediate move by his admirers to anoint him the greatest of all time. He was subsequently given the new – and in retrospect the rather overstated – nickname of "Superman." Granted, the later part of Jones' career was wildly uneven, but his win over Ruiz was hyped by some as a monumental occurrence, as if he'd climbed Mount Everest barefoot without ropes.

And nobody hyped it more than Jones himself.

"It's bigger than me," Jones said after the bout. "I wanted to do something great for the sport of boxing."

Yet there are major differences between Jones' defeat of Ruiz and Crawford's win over Alvarez.

Despite giving up 33 pounds in weight, seven and a half inches in reach and four inches in height, Jones was a 2-1 betting favorite. Ruiz, though he owned an alphabet belt, was hardly the cream of the heavyweights, was rather one-dimensional and was certainly not a star by any measure. The Los Angeles Times put it succinctly by describing Ruiz as "a footnote to history."

The Times also labeled the fight correctly by writing it "wasn't always as entertaining as it was historic."

8 \ Manny Pacquiao vs. Antonio Margarito, 2010

Though now it's remembered as just another night in Pacquiao's amazing career, the buildup to Pacquiao-Margarito was highly dramatic. Pacquiao, who began his career at 106 pounds, was now fighting for a vacant belt at junior middleweight against Margarito, a much taller and bigger-boned character. Even when he emerged from the featherweight classes to take on lightweights and welterweights, Pacquiao had seemed tiny. It felt inevitable that he'd someday run into an opponent who was simply too big for him. Some thought the menacing Margarito would be the guy to end PacMan's streak of success.

The intrigue continued at the weigh-in when Manny was well short of the agreed-upon 150-pound catchweight, coming in at 144.6, a surprisingly low weight that was even well below the welterweight limit. Margarito weighed a chiseled 150, stood an alarming five inches taller than Pacquiao and exceeded Pacquiao's reach by six inches. Adding to these factors was a rumor that Pacquiao had been distracted by his recent foray into Philippine politics.

Moreover, Margarito's reputation was as dark as anyone's has ever been in boxing, what with allegations of loading his gloves in a recent fight, which led some to claim he should be banned for life. As punishment for the glove tampering, Margarito was denied a license to fight in Las Vegas, which resulted in the fight taking place in Texas at Cowboys Stadium.

Adding to his badman persona, Margarito was caught on video mocking Pacquiao's trainer, Freddie Roach, apparently laughing at Roach's Parkinson's disease. Margarito apologized, but there was something about him that made people uneasy. Smiling cockily underneath his sinister mustache, Margarito looked more villainous by the day. When it was learned that he'd rehydrated to 165 pounds by fight night, there was an ominous feeling at ringside. Pacquiao was a wide betting favorite, but until the fight started and fans could see him at work, there was no downplaying the threat posed by Margarito. He was the living embodiment of a black storm cloud.

In the end, however, the fight was all Pacquiao's. He battered Margarito for 12 rounds, taking an easy decision, winning the vacant WBC title and sending Margarito home with a fractured orbital bone. "I can't believe I beat someone this big and this strong," Pacquiao said after the bout.

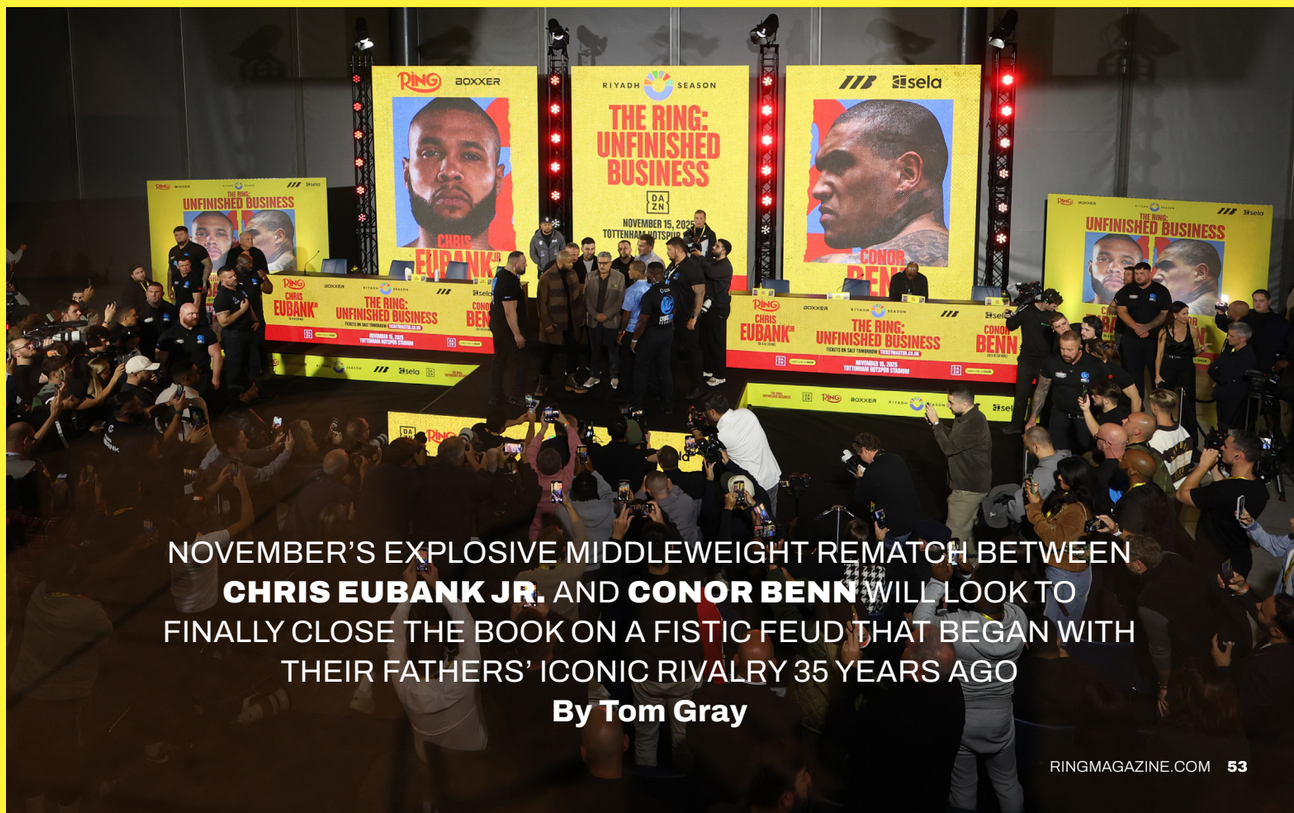
It was his eighth division title, a record that may never be surpassed.

Of course, a much younger Pacquiao had once jumped from flyweight to junior featherweight, so fighting bigger opponents was not new to him. And as Crawford pointed out after beating Alvarez, size isn't always a factor. Not when you're possessed of sublime talents.

"A lot of people put too much in me moving up in weight," Crawford said. "Canelo is not a big guy. He's a smaller guy fighting in a big weight class." Noting that he had longer arms than Alvarez, Crawford added, "All in all, we're about the same size." He further explained that Alvarez was far from being the hardest puncher he'd ever faced.

Fair enough. Maybe Alvarez's size wasn't so important, after all. All we know for certain is that the fighter of the moment is a plainspoken father of seven from the American heartland. As you'll be reminded constantly in the coming months, he's the first male boxer in the four-belt era to be undisputed champ in three weight classes. Whether he's the greatest ever or just great for this year is impossible to say. But being mentioned with Henry Armstrong and Sugar Ray Leonard is great enough for now. RING

THE FINAL CONFLICT?



NOVEMBER'S EXPLOSIVE MIDDLEWEIGHT REMATCH BETWEEN **CHRIS EUBANK JR.** AND **CONOR BENN** WILL LOOK TO FINALLY CLOSE THE BOOK ON A FISTIC FEUD THAT BEGAN WITH THEIR FATHERS' ICONIC RIVALRY 35 YEARS AGO

By Tom Gray

Such is the hostility between British boxing stars Chris Eubank Jr. and Conor Benn that smashing each other to bits for 12 rounds was never going to be enough. While Eubank rightfully claimed a unanimous decision win on April 26 at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium in London, he's more than happy to go again. Meanwhile, Benn is desperate to even the score against his archnemesis.

On November 15, we return to the very same location for Act II of Eubank Jr. vs. Benn, which has developed from joke status into a multilayered and red-hot rivalry. In the early days, these were simply two professional fighters with legendary fathers who were world titleholders and competed against each other at the elite level. Any talk of a fight between the sons, who campaigned two weight classes apart, was viewed by the majority as an unapologetic and meaningless cash grab.

Then things went crazy for a couple of years.

The original October 2022 fight date fell through because Benn tested positive for a banned substance (clomifene). He denied any wrongdoing but was suspended from competing on U.K. soil. Benn was then cleared to compete in the U.K. without a viable excuse for how he'd tested positive in the first place. Do you want more? When the fight was rescheduled, controversy surrounded the 10-pound rehydration clause, which was viewed as dangerous for the much larger Eubank. And, finally, Eubank smashed an egg on Benn's face at a press conference.

When the pair finally met at the inaugural Ring Magazine event, the bad blood was at a boiling point and the atmosphere inside the arena was electric. Almost 67,000 fans turned up for a middleweight non-title attraction, which was the byproduct of peerless innovation when it came to pre-fight hype.

And then came the biggest surprise of all: Chris Eubank Jr. and Conor Benn duked it out in a spectacular battle, which is guaranteed to be a nominee for Ring Magazine Fight of the Year. After all the belittling, all the name-calling, all the controversy, the fight delivered when it mattered most, elevating the profiles of both winner and loser. That's why no one is complaining that these born rivals are doing it all again.

The Ring recently caught up with Eubank Jr., who is determined to repeat his biggest triumph and end the Benn rivalry once and for all.

The Ring: When you look back at the first fight, what's your assessment of your performance?

Chris Eubank Jr: I put it all on the line. I never gave up. I never gave him space to get started. He came in there with a game plan, and I shut everything down at every opportunity.

It was a tough fight, and I was feeling the effects of the weight cut and the rehydration clause, but I blocked that all out and did what I needed to do to win.

The Ring: After 12 rounds against Conor Benn, tell me what he does well and what he should continue to work on.

CE: He didn't give up. He didn't quit. He stood his ground. I was more impressed with his mentality than anything else. Physically, he's a young kid. He shouldn't be letting a 36-year-old man beat him. No 36-year-old on the planet would have beaten me when I was 28.

Mentally, he stood there and decided that he wasn't going to back down. He wasn't going to be pushed around. He wasn't going to give up. A lot of people give up in these hairy, tough fights. Once they realize they're not going to win or that it's going to be tough, they look for a way out. He didn't do that.

We're used to seeing [quit] in fighters these days. Fans appreciate two guys who have an old-school mentality. If we go out, we're gonna go out on our shield. Not every fighter has that fighting mentality, if you know what I mean.

The Ring: Your jab and your long-range work were terrific early. Did you decide to stop boxing like that to have a tear-up, or did Benn force you to have a tear-up?

CE: No, nobody forces me to do anything. It got to a stage where I was cut, and I decided in my mind that tactics, finesse, looking good, strategy … none of that was going to secure me the win. I felt that becoming a barbarian and putting him through the fire, a place he'd never been before, was the best way to win, so that's what I did.

I didn't want the fight to get stopped because of my cut. There was a chance of that, so I knew that I had to go forward and put my hands on him as much as I could. I didn't want to leave it to the judges. I was impressed that he was able to still be in that ring for the final bell.

The Ring: Give all the reasons why you're just a better fighter than Conor Benn. Why is this mission impossible for him in your eyes?

CE: I'm too skilled. I'm too experienced. I'm too long in the tooth. I'm too tough. You're not going to out-tough me, and that's really what it came down to in the first fight. He's not tougher than me. He's not willing to go further than I am. That's why he can't win.

The Ring: Will the rematch be more of the same, or will it be a completely different fight?

CE: I'm going to try to make it a different fight. I don't want to go 12 rounds if I don't have to. I'm going to try to take his head off early.

There's definitely a lot to learn from those 12 rounds on both sides. We both lived with each other for 12 rounds. We know the limits. We know the good parts of each other, and the bad parts – weaknesses, strengths, mentality, speed, [physical] strength… we know all that about each other now, so there's a lot that can be used to prepare for the next one.

It's about who can prepare better. That's who will have the advantage in the rematch.

I was more impressed with his mentality than anything else. **Physically, he's a young kid.** He shouldn't be letting a 36-year-old man beat him.

The Ring: Explain how the process of making 160 and then limiting your rehydration makes you feel in the ring as compared to when you rehydrate fully.

CE: It's extremely unnatural. I mean, it's unnatural to cut weight as it is, but then it's extremely unnatural to cut that weight and be watching and monitoring and limiting what you're eating and drinking after the [weigh-in], which is what I had to do. I've never had to do that before.

I did feel the effects of it during the fight. I was in hospital for two days due to severe dehydration. It affects your strength, your speed, your stamina, your energy levels, everything. You just notice that you have less energy in spots where you usually would have more. It's a mental battle that you have to have with yourself, to still believe in your abilities and believe you can win.

The Ring: Are you concerned that these weight cuts and rehydration clauses could be detrimental to your career long-term?

CE: These are not the types of fights and weight cuts that are conducive to longevity in the sport. But you need to do what you need to do – this is what I signed up for.

I'm 36 years old. I've been there and I've done it. At this stage of my career, I'm not looking for fights that will give me the best chance of longevity. I'm looking for fights that will test me, make me the most money and inspire the fans. I want to go out with a bang. I don't want easy fights or safe fights. I'm not built that way. I never have been.

The Ring: It doesn't seem that long ago that critics were mocking this rivalry, saying that both of you were cashing in on your father's respective legacies. How satisfying is it to have engaged in a classic fight that was a resounding success?

CE: That fight superseded boxing. There was family, there was history, there was a story, there was pride. There was a father and son coming together and uniting in front of the world, which is bigger than boxing (Eubank Jr. and his father were estranged for years but made up before the fight). That transcended boxing. It was a story that reached the world, and people were captivated by it. To be part of something that can supersede the sport you've dedicated your life to is a great feeling.

The Ring: What will Brian McIntyre add to your repertoire ahead of the rematch?

CE: Bomac is one of the best trainers in the world. He's tried and proven. We had a great camp for the [Liam] Smith 2 fight. He brings a new special source to me, to my preparation and to my execution for this fight.

We want to keep [Team Benn] on

their toes. Even though I won, we don't want to be doing the same preparation as we did for the last fight. They're going to be practicing things to negate what I did well. Now we have to do other things well, so Bomac will help me do that.

The Ring: Your father had legendary rematches in his own career. Has he been sharing the knowledge?
CE: No, he hasn't. He doesn't want me to continue fighting and thinks I've done enough. At 36 years old, he can't understand how I'm still doing what I'm doing. He retired at 32.

He's a father who's worried about his son. He said, "You've got all the chips. Cash them in. Get out of the casino." That's what he said.

The Ring: Do you think your longevity comes down to superior nutrition, strength and conditioning, or anything else that's around now and perhaps wasn't when your dad was fighting?

Chris Eubank Sr. and Nigel Benn watched live as their sons produced a classic.

CE: No, it's not about what's around and what wasn't around. It's about your mindset as a man and as a fighter. My mindset has always been longevity. It's always been about dedicating my life [to boxing], making sure I'm not blowing up in weight outside of camp, making sure I stay in the gym, making sure I live a productive life.

I'm always ready to start a boxing camp. A lot of guys fight and that's it. They just wait for the next fight. Hey, I've got eight weeks, now I'm gonna train again. That's tough and can affect your longevity. Smoking, drinking, drugs. Not to say my father did any of that stuff. I guess he just burned out. The way he was living and the way he was fighting and training, he just burned out. He couldn't do it at 32. I always wanted to go further and made sure I was doing things in my life to where I didn't burn out.

The Ring: What were your thoughts on Canelo vs. Crawford?
CE: It was a great fight. It wasn't like a blockbuster that will go down in the history books [in terms of action], but in terms of performance, Bud did everything he needed to do. He dominated technically. He dominated in speed, accuracy, game plan, strategy and even power. He was standing in the pocket and getting his shots off better than Canelo.

He and his team came up with the game plan and executed it excellently. It was extremely impressive, and the world now sees him as one of the pound-for-pound greats.

The Ring: When you look at all-time greats in the sport, where does Crawford belong now and why?
CE: I don't know. I don't really look into all that. I'm not the guy to ask.

The Ring: OK, not the historian then. You'll be confident in defeating Benn for a second time. What are your plans for 2026?
CE: Canelo or Crawford, or any other big name or world title opportunity. As I said, I'm 36 years old and I'm not looking for easy fights. I'm looking to go out with a bang – as big and spectacularly as I can. I want big fights. I want to test myself.

The Ring: You're a huge star in the U.K. There were 67,000 fans for the first fight with Conor Benn, and it'll be a similar number this time. Could you lure these big stars over to the U.K.?
CE: For sure. Canelo has been very vocal about wanting to fight in the U.K., and what other names are out there? There aren't any. The fight makes sense. I spoke to His Excellency Turki Alalshikh privately, and he said that's a fight he wants to get made, so we'll see what happens.

The Ring: What can fans expect from Benn vs. Eubank II? Why should they tune in?
CE: I said before the first fight that it would be better than what my old man and Nigel Benn produced 35 years ago. I didn't really believe that, but I was speaking something into existence – the laws of attraction. I knew I was willing to put that type of performance in, but I didn't know if Benn had it in him. Now I know he does.

That was a Fight of the Year contender. I don't see anyone else this year who has come up with a better fight than that.

The Ring: I agree.
CE: So, if that's what we produced when we didn't know anything about each other, what can we produce when we do know about each other? We know the weaknesses. We know the strengths.

Benn will be hell-bent on avenging that loss. I'm hell-bent on keeping the Eubank name above the Benn name. I think this fight is gonna be even bigger, even better, and this could be Fight of the Year. This one could top the original. If you want to see that, then tune in.

The Ring: A sequel that surpasses the original? Some would say like The Godfather to The Godfather Part II.
CE: There you go.

FIVE ALL-BRITISH REMATCHES

Innumerable high-profile, all-British rematches have taken place down the years, but here are five sequels that captivated U.K. fight fans over the past half-century.

It's worth noting that in all five rematches, the loser of the original bout failed to gain revenge.

Alan Minter PTS 15 Kevin Finnegan

Sept. 14, 1976, Royal Albert Hall, London
Title: British middleweight

Before his reign as undisputed middleweight champion, Alan Minter struck up a fierce and hotly contested rivalry with former British and European titleholder Kevin Finnegan.

In November 1975, Minter pipped his foe by a half point on the old British scoring system to win the first fight. The rematch was just as close, with Minter surviving a brutal last-round assault from a bloodied but rampaging Finnegan to prevail via the same margin.

Minter won the trilogy bout in November 1977, also on a close points verdict.

Chris Eubank TKO 12 Michael Watson

Sept. 21, 1991, White Hart Lane, London
Title: WBO super middleweight

Controversy surrounded Chris Eubank Sr.'s first triumph over Michael Watson, with many fans and media members lambasting the decision that allowed Eubank to retain his WBO middleweight crown via majority decision.

Three months later, the pair threw down again for the vacant WBO super middleweight title. This was an epic battle that is remembered for its tragic aftermath. Way behind on points and decked in the penultimate round, Eubank rose to floor his rival with a powerful right uppercut that caused the Englishman's head to ricochet off the bottom rope. Watson, a brilliant fighter, suffered a life-changing brain injury.

Chris Eubank Draw 12 Nigel Benn

Oct. 9, 1993, Old Trafford, Manchester
Titles: WBC/WBO super middleweight

In one of the greatest all-British showdowns ever seen, Chris Eubank came of age by scoring a ninth-round stoppage over pre-fight favorite Nigel Benn in November 1990.

The rematch marinated for almost three years, by which time both men had begun reigns as super middleweight titleholders. Almost 47,000 people were in the stadium that night, with a reported 16.5 million watching on free TV in the U.K. alone.

An unsatisfactory split draw was the official result. Decades later, Eubank admitted that Benn won this fight.

Carl Froch TKO 8 George Groves

May 31, 2014, Wembley Stadium, London
Titles: IBF/WBA super middleweight

In November 2013, George Groves performed brilliantly before losing via ninth-round TKO to Carl Froch in Manchester. The challenger decked "The Cobra" heavily in Round 1, outboxed him for long spells and was ahead on points before a controversial stoppage derailed him.

Six months later, in front of 80,000 fans, Froch was a different animal for the sequel. The Nottingham man matched Groves technically before closing out with one of the most destructive finishes in modern boxing history in the eighth. A huge right hand was the decisive blow and the perfect mic drop for the final fight of Froch's Hall of Fame career.

Tony Bellew TKO 5 David Haye

May 5, 2018, O2 Arena, London
Titles: Heavyweight non-title

Tony Bellew was the underdog when he met the naturally bigger David Haye in March 2017. However, through five rounds, the Liverpool man was faring better than many thought he would. Suddenly, in Round 6, Haye ruptured his Achilles tendon and Bellew took command, eventually stopping his rival by knocking him out of the ring in Round 11.

The rematch was a natural, and this time the ending was decisive. Bellew was more assertive with his offense and moved well throughout. Haye was continually falling short and left himself open to a huge left hook that decked him in Round 5. Bellew's follow-up attack convinced the referee to call the fight off seconds later.

HOW TO WATCH BOXING:

TAKING AWAY THE JAB

By Adam Abramowitz

When watching boxing, you will often see a network analyst review the "keys" to the fight. And if you watch enough of these breakdowns, you'll frequently see that Fighter A must "take away the jab" from Fighter B to be successful. That sounds simple, but is it?

The jab is the foundational punch of boxing. It's the rhythm-setter, the range-finder, the prober, and in some cases it can be just as destructive as a power punch. It's the closest punch to the target, the basic building block of boxing. Every fighter learns to throw the jab before trying to master any subsequent punch.

But how many fighters have devoted a similar amount of time in trying to take the jab away? The good jabber will already have a built-in advantage over an opponent who is trying to take it away, due to years of repetition with the punch.

Taking the jab away can be done, and it can be accomplished in several ways. Let's dig into a number of them:

RANGE

Because it involves extending the arm, a jab is a punch that can best be landed at midrange or at distance, where there is a spatial pocket formed between two fighters.

But what happens when the preferred range to land a jab ceases to exist? That can happen in a few scenarios. One is to get all the way in, another is to stay all the way out. Both tactics can take away a jab if executed effectively.

There is a type of boxer sometimes referred to as an ambush fighter, who knows exactly how to stay out of range for a jab. That boxer will stand away from his or her opponent at a distance way too far for an opponent to land the jab. Roy Jones Jr. was a great ambush fighter. Jean Pascal and Carl Froch could be as well. They stayed away, and then they found a specific moment to rush in with shots, usually from an angle.

This scenario confounds the traditional jabber. He or she won't be able to jab the ambush fighter, because the ambusher sets up shop too far away. And the ambusher is rarely coming in the front door; they are leading with shots from unusual entry points, doing damage and then getting out of range to repeat the cycle.

Another way to take a jab away is to smother it, get so close to the fighter that the opponent can't extend his or her arms to connect with the jab, which is a punch designed to control

Icon Sports Wire

Mxrtinzz nxils formzr four-wzight titlzholdzr Kxzuto lokx.

distance. If the distance is already broken, then the jab ceases to be a weapon.

In talking with trainer Robert Garcia, he mentioned two of his fighters who were successful at breaking the range of a jabber by getting in close: Brandon Rios and Marcos Maidana.

Maidana had unconventional movements and threw punch combinations in unusual sequences. In addition, his underrated foot speed allowed him to get close to a fighter, often with relative ease.

"Maidana wasn't a counterpuncher," said Garcia. "He was so difficult and so awkward that he took not only the jab away, but often everything else, too. Everyone had a difficult time against Maidana."

Brandon Rios was a more traditional pressure fighter. He didn't have the foot speed of Maidana, but he had the confidence and chin to keep pressing forward, eventually breaking the range of the jabber so that he could do his own damage in close.

"Rios had that high guard to block or catch jabs as he was coming forward," said Garcia. "A high guard can be very effective. But you have to have a great stance and great positioning to take away the jab like he did. A jab can easily take you out of position, to lead you to making mistakes. You have to have great strength and footwork to stand strong against the jab, to not let it frustrate you or move you around.

"But Rios had a specific mindset, too. He never thought a jab was going to hurt him. He was good at taking away the jab because he wasn't afraid of it. He was one of those guys who kept coming and wasn't bothered by the jab."

COUNTERING

A fighter can still keep a pocket and be successful at taking away the jab. A great counterpuncher can force a jabber to keep that punch at home. And there are many potential ways to successfully counter a jab.

Trainer Stephen "Breadman" Edwards still marvels at how a 5-foot-6 Dwight Muhammad Qawi would be able to take away the jabs of much bigger and longer light heavyweights, cruiserweights and heavyweights. Furthermore, even though Qawi had the shorter arms in almost all of his matchups, he often was the one who established supremacy with his jab. Qawi perfected a technique of ducking under a jab and firing off his own as a counter.

"Your jab would go over his head," said Edwards, "but Qawi's jab would go right into your guard. He would constantly jab guys who were six-one or six-two and out-jab them."

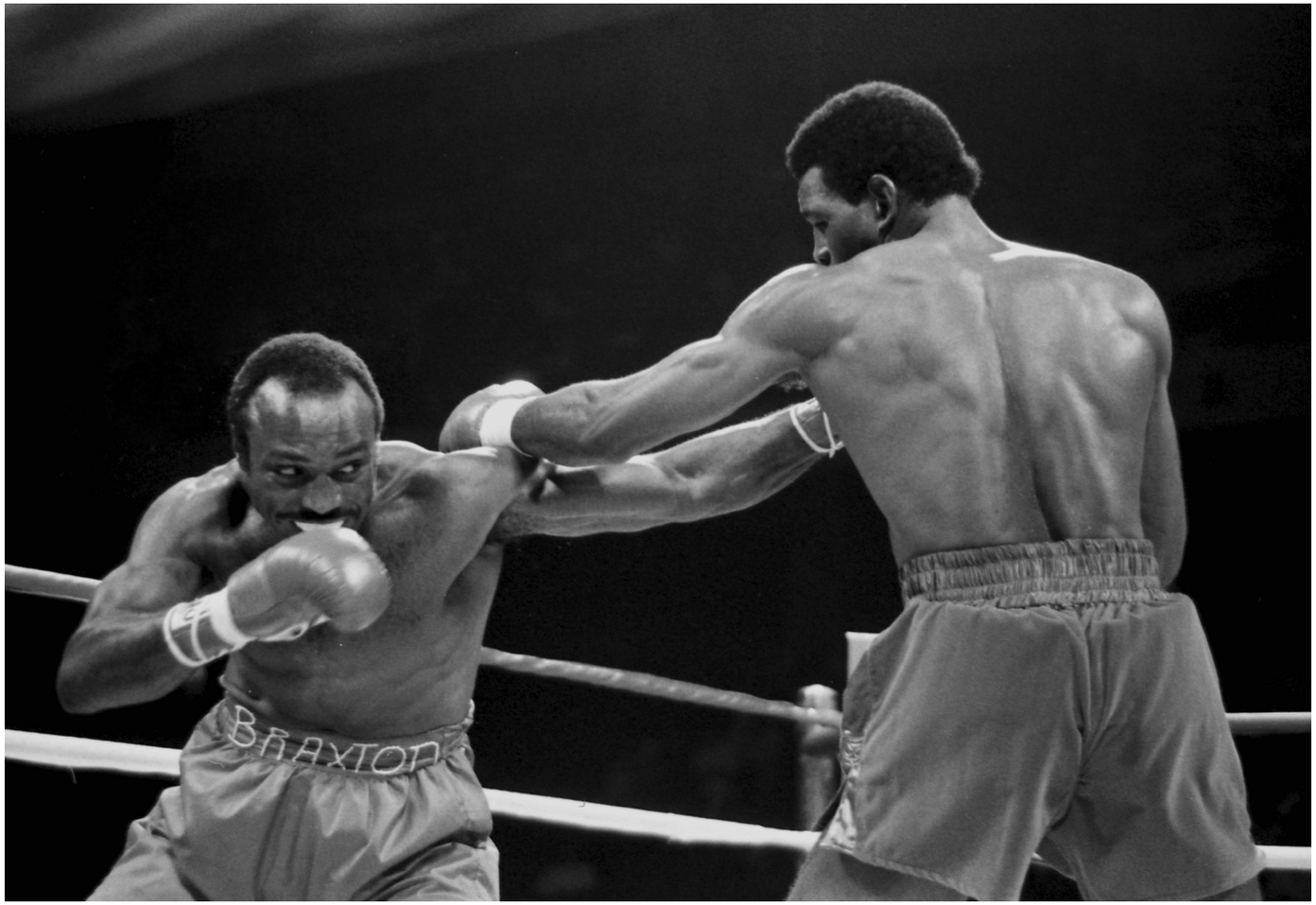
Edwards is also a proponent of a fighter jabbing with a good jabber to keep the good jabber occupied on defense. Edwards cites Ken Norton as a great example of this. Even though Norton's jab was not considered to be on the same level as Muhammad Ali's or Larry Holmes', Norton found significant success in those matchups and was able to establish footholds in those fights by forcing them to defend his own jab.

TIMING

Here is where things can get really interesting. Good jabbers can be defeated by being beaten to the punch or by their own jabs being countered so that they are reluctant to throw. Thus, one can hypothetically take away the jab by being first or by being last.

Garcia brings up a great example where "being first" led to a decisive victory:

"My dad (Eduardo Garcia) trained Fernando Vargas, and Vargas was facing Ike Quartey, who had one of the best jabs in the sport. And Fernando beat him to the jab and won the fight. I think that's the best way to beat a guy with a great jab. You got to be first. You got to be faster. Beat him to it."



The short and squat Qawi was renowned for out-jabbing much larger men to set up his attacks.

Edwards provided an example where being first was to a fighter's detriment:

"I believe that Emanuel Steward had one of the best game plans of all time for the second Bowe-Holyfield fight. Every time Bowe would jab, Holyfield would catch the jab with his rear jab and then come back with a double jab. He would also double jab Bowe to the head and body at times. That creates confusion in a guy's mind, because now he has to defend multiple areas. If, over time, Bowe keeps getting countered, he's going to try something else, which is exactly what Holyfield wanted in that fight. He got Bowe, a great jabber, to move off his jab and on to something else."

By no means is the above an exhaustive list on how to take away the jab. There are other techniques that can be successful. Some fighters will position themselves to the opposite side of their opponent's jab hand to take away the punch and make them win with their rear hand. Roberto Duran was a master at hitting the jab arm or shoulder to try and weaken the opponent and render him unable to throw the jab consistently over the course of a fight. But this is a good start in understanding how a fighter can neutralize the punch.

CONCEPT IN PRACTICE: BERNARD HOPKINS VS. KELLY PAVLIK (2008)

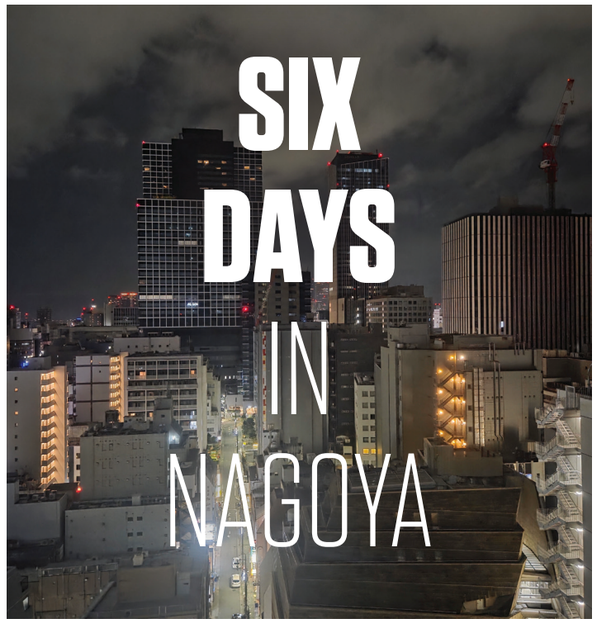
Kelly Pavlik entered his fight with Bernard Hopkins with a world of confidence. He had recently defeated Jermain Taylor twice and had established himself as the top fighter at middleweight. He had a 17-year age advantage over Hopkins (26 to 43), and Hopkins was coming off a loss to Joe Calzaghe in a close fight where Hopkins struggled to let his hands go with regularity. Pavlik was viewed by many as too fresh and too powerful in the matchup, despite the fight being contested at a catchweight of 170 pounds.

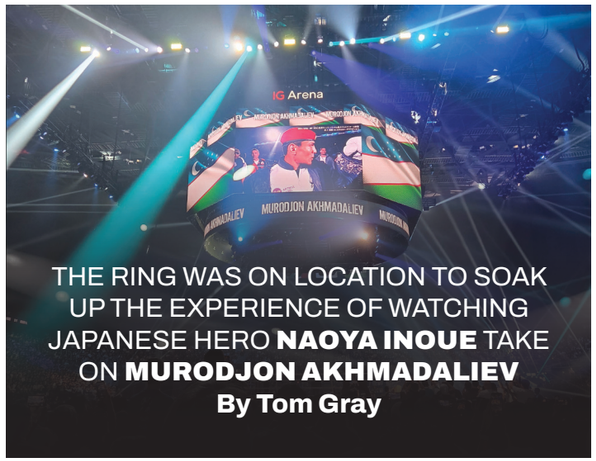
Pavlik was essentially a two-punch fighter: a jab and a right hand. For Pavlik, everything seemed to work off the jab. He would often double and triple his jab in order to land his right hand.

Hopkins employed a variety of the tactics delineated in this article to neutralize the jab. Primarily, Hopkins operated as an ambush fighter during the bout. He was well out of range for Pavlik to land the punch. Rarely stationary, Hopkins wouldn't allow himself to become a hittable target for Pavlik's jab. Hopkins also believed in being first through a lot of the fight. Starting out of range, he would dart in with lead punches. Hopkins quickly grasped that Pavlik's jab functioned only as a lead punch and not as a counter. Thus, Hopkins would enter the action behind a straight right, a left hook or a combination, which often would include the right hand-left uppercut or right hand-left hook. He would also double up on punches to the head and body, especially with straight rights or left hooks. His punch variety kept Pavlik guessing.

As the fight progressed, Hopkins also flashed dazzling counters. He'd counter Pavlik's jab with the straight right over the jab or roll under the jab and connect with a left hook to the body. He even would lead with the jab, realizing that Pavlik wasn't prepared to counter. If the distance was broken, Hopkins would tie up.

In short, Hopkins displayed a masterclass in how to take away the jab. Utilizing all the tricks of the trade and every punch in his arsenal, Hopkins was able to neutralize one of Pavlik's primary weapons. He would win 117-109, 118-108 and 119-106 on the scorecards. RING





THE RING WAS ON LOCATION TO SOAK UP THE EXPERIENCE OF WATCHING JAPANESE HERO **NAOYA INOUE** TAKE ON **MURODJON AKHMADALIEV**

By Tom Gray

If you're going to travel 6,000 miles over a period of 24 hours, then it really has to be worth it. That amount of travel, particularly if you don't sleep on flights, is one serious endurance test. Well, my assignment was to cover Naoya Inoue's Ring Magazine and undisputed junior featherweight championship defense against WBA interim titleholder Murodjon "MJ" Akhmadaliev in Nagoya, Japan. Trust me, it was worth it.

Inoue, of course, won the fight, which took place at the newly erected 17,000-seat IG Arena on September 14. It was a tidy, disciplined and cerebral display from the Japanese hero, who morphed from "The Monster" to the marksman in order to overcome the former unified world titleholder by 12-round unanimous decision.

The result itself is what I expected long before I set foot in Japan, but the trip turned up plenty of surprises – some good, some slightly crazy, and one altogether heartbreaking.

NIPPON

This was my second trip to "The Land of the Rising Sun." In November 2019, I traveled to Saitama for Inoue's World Boxing Super Series final against Nonito Donaire. Despite it being the trip of a lifetime, my expectations for that fight were actually pretty low. Inoue was hitting his peak, whereas I felt the 36-year-old Donaire was an accident waiting to happen. I should have known better.

In defeat, the great Donaire took Inoue to the depths of hell, cracking his right orbital bone with a left hook and hurting him on several occasions throughout the course of a ferocious 12-rounder. Inoue was rightfully awarded a unanimous decision that night, but it was the first time that an opponent forced him to showcase his greatness. The Ring's 2019 Fight of the Year was the best fight I've ever seen live.

Inoue would win his next 11 fights, all by knockout, and claimed two undisputed championships before signing on to face Akhmadaliev. His fame and following had grown exponentially at home and abroad, so when I came across innumerable digital fight posters and video billboards in train stations, bus stations and on the streets of Nagoya, I wasn't in the least bit surprised. Inoue has earned the big buildup.

GETTING LUCKY

On Thursday evening of fight week, I headed down to the hotel restaurant for dinner. Moments later, I received an email from Masa Ueda, who works for Teiken Promotions in a PR capacity. Masa asked if I was in Nagoya, and I answered in the affirmative. He then explained that he thought he'd seen me in the restaurant but wasn't sure. Moments later, he came over to my table and quickly informed me that MJ was in the same hotel. I asked Masa if he could help me arrange an interview, and within an hour, I was speaking to the challenger in the lobby. Masa, as diligent a professional as one could ever meet, is a great person to know.

When Akhmadaliev approached, I was immediately struck by how good he looked. There's a difference between being in the presence of a fit and healthy person and an elite-level athlete.

MJ's eyes almost danced, his skin was perfect, and there wasn't the slightest sign that he was debilitated from cutting weight. I immediately took note that the Uzbekistan-born southpaw was in excellent fighting shape.

At the end of the interview, which was posted on The Ring's website, MJ asked social media content creator Mukhammadkodir Egamov, who had been translating, to find out my prediction for the fight. I explained that I was picking Inoue by late TKO or decision, at which point the challenger patted me on the shoulder and said, "I see you after fight!"

From the moment the match was made official in the summer, Akhmadaliev was written off by fans and media. My feeling was that he simply wanted another boost of motivation from someone else picking against him. The fighter said goodbye and made his way to the elevator. I wished him luck.

LOST IN TRANSLATION

On Friday, I attended the final press conference at the Nagoya Hilton. Not much was translated into English; after all, I was one of the only Western journalists in attendance. Conversely, there were a couple hundred local press on hand for the fifth defense of Inoue's undisputed crown. It was a good-natured affair, with the highlight being Akhmadaliev presenting the champ and his co-promoter/manager, Hideyuki Ohashi, with traditional Uzbekistan robes known as chapans.

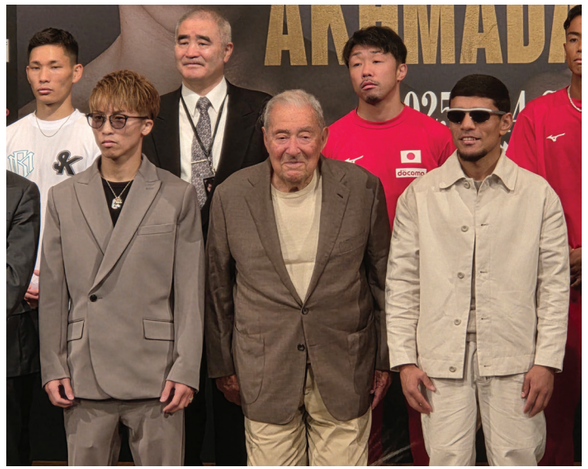
Visiting Japan also allowed me to catch up with, for my money, the finest boxing photographer in the world. After the press conference, I took the opportunity to interview Naoki Fukuda about his life and career. It was a wonderful experience, and that feature will be available in a forthcoming issue of The Ring. Naoki was translated by Mizuka Koike, yet another amazing professional, who is irreplaceable in her role as the big-fight translator in Japan.

At the weigh-in on Saturday, both champion and challenger would make the 122-pound limit without incident. However, Inoue walked onto the stage with a different demeanor from what we'd seen at the press conference. Bespectacled and bejeweled, he was adorned in his own custom merchandise and had the look of an assassin. MJ, eyes wide, held his own and flexed his impressive physique on the scales, but I gave this round to Inoue on presence alone. The guy is one serious badass!

THE FIGHT BEFORE THE FIGHT

Japan (JST) is 16 hours ahead of Las Vegas (PT), which means that the Inoue vs. Akhmadaliev show was likely to clash with the Canelo vs. Crawford main event. I was on business, so the latter would have to be sacrificed if the shows overlapped, and I'd accepted that fact before I made the trip.

I ordered room service – which I would usually avoid ($) – during the Crawford-Canelo undercard. I watched Christian Mbilli and Lester Martinez battle furiously to a 10-round split draw. I then checked out Callum Walsh's impressive points triumph over Fernando Vargas Jr., a victory that has the Irishman on the cusp of a junior middleweight world title fight.



The main event was just about to get underway when I had to leave for the arena.

From the back of a taxi, I watched the ring entrances and the national anthems. When I arrived at the arena, the heat was oppressive, and I began to sweat. That was OK, though, because who was going to notice? Well, how about the super-friendly Japanese news crew that jumped in front of me before I reached the steps? They asked me some questions about Inoue as my skin continued to leak, and I was finally on my way.

Upon entering the media room, the Canelo vs. Crawford fight had just gotten underway. A group of journalists surrounded a tablet, but I noticed that their stream was breaking up and was a few seconds behind, so I stuck to watching the action on my cell phone. Naoki then informed me that the first fight on the Inoue vs. MJ undercard would start in 45 minutes. Talk about good timing.

SYE WILLIAMS

As we all know, "Bud" pulled off the so-called upset and became the first male fighter in the two-, three- or four-belt eras to capture three undisputed championships in as many weights. In the late 1930s, Henry Armstrong held featherweight, lightweight and welterweight titles simultaneously. For his part, Crawford is a former Ring/lineal lightweight champion who conquered the 140- and 147-pound divisions on his way to holding every available belt at super middleweight. The Omaha native is an authentic all-time great – case closed.

THE MONSTER VS. MJ

The Inoue vs. Akhmadaliev undercard had a bit of everything: strong performances, bone-crushing stoppages and big shocks. The co-main event actually had all three, with Mexico's Christian Medina wrenching the WBO bantamweight crown from the previously unbeaten Yoshiki Takei via pulverizing fourth-round stoppage.

Once the home crowd got over Takei's capitulation, they rose as one for Inoue as he made his walk to the ring. While a Japanese fight crowd is known to be quiet in comparison to their more raucous U.S. and U.K. counterparts, Inoue's entrance produced serious voltage. The atmosphere was terrific.

The opening round of the main event, as is often the case during boxing matches at the top level, was used for surveying. Inoue was laser-sharp with his hands and feet, firing out the jab, and there was one memorable straight right to the body that became a signature move. The bell ended the first round, I quickly entered 10-9 for Inoue on my scorecard, made some notes … and then my heart sank.

A friend of mine sent a WhatsApp message that came up as a preview on my laptop: "FFS RIP Ricky Hatton." I instantly went cold and felt really upset, but I had to gather myself to do a job in real time. Getting through the remainder of that main event and putting Ricky's death to the back of my mind was one of the hardest things I've done in my career.

Ricky and I weren't close friends, but I watched him compete from 1997 to 2012. I also met him a few times, dealt with him professionally and thought the world of him. The former two-weight world champ and Hall of Famer had the unique gift of being impossible to dislike. He was brilliant. "The Hitman" was a great fighter, a great human being, and I'll never forget him.

CATCHING THE MONSTER

Getting a one-on-one interview with Inoue during fight week was going to be almost as difficult as beating him in the ring. I'd asked around but was assured by a variety of different sources that it wouldn't happen. That was fine, and I understood completely, so I turned my attention to the post-fight press conference.

The main takeaway from the MJ fight was that Inoue went out of his way to box clever and never opened up for the finish. When was the last time that happened? Instead of utilizing Monster-mode, the champ was tactically perfect, neutralizing Akhmadaliev's ability to counter by mixing eyeblink-quick jabs and power punches with rapid footwork. Simply put, he was too quick to counter. Forced to come forward, MJ was nowhere near as effective, and that was the story of the fight.

With Mizuka next to me to translate, I asked the champion about his tactical approach. "I focused on how to stick to my strategy, and I think I did great," Inoue told The Ring. "This is Team Ohashi and Team Inoue's result, and I'm so happy about it."

Was it satisfying to go the distance for the first time in six years?

SIX DAYS IN NAGOYA

The great Inoue picked some beautiful single shots throughout the quick-paced battle.

"I not only score decisive knockout wins, but this is what I can do [as a boxer]," Inoue continued. "I was able to show my abilities, which is very satisfying. This is very important as a professional boxer. Either way, I want to show everybody a good fight."

When I went for question number three, a PR rep cut his hand through the air to indicate my time was up. Tell you what, the rep had good hand speed, and I certainly got the message. I looked toward Inoue, managed to blurt out "arigato" in a broad Scottish accent, and left shortly thereafter.

As I went outside, I began thinking about Ricky. By this time, I'd read a couple of social media posts and skimmed a story or two. I still couldn't believe it. Being at the Manchester Arena live when Hatton dethroned Kostya Tszyu for the Ring Magazine junior welterweight championship was one of my most cherished boxing memories.

That felt like yesterday … and now this?

As I stood waiting for a taxi, staring into space, a young kid approached and asked me to "sign." He held a black marker and a piece of cardboard, and his girlfriend stood behind him smiling. We struggled with the language barrier, but eventually I realized that he'd seen me interviewed about boxing by my good friend Daisuke Sugiura for Japanese sports magazine and website Number. It was a fight fan wanting my autograph, which I found both amusing and flattering in equal measure. I actually needed that moment.

I got my taxi, but I wanted to toast Ricky with a few beers. I fell asleep after two.

THE MORNING AFTER

It was my final day in Japan, so I got myself ready and headed down for breakfast. Almost immediately, I noticed Mukhammadkodir, who had helped translate my pre-fight interview with MJ. He told me the former champ was bearing up well and that he'd be willing to speak to me before heading to the airport.

About an hour later, Akhmadaliev came down to the lobby bar. He looked good and moved well, with his designer shades covering any signs of fight damage. I bought us some coffee and we spoke for a few minutes. The entire interview revolved around MJ complaining that he'd been rushed to the ring following Takei's early stoppage loss and that he didn't get a proper warm-up. He felt this had hampered his performance.

"I saw all the punches clearly, but if I'd been warmed up, everything would be different," said Akhmadaliev via translator. "I was thinking about throwing the punches, but my hands and my body wouldn't respond.

"Of course, Inoue is a good boxer. His speed is good, but it's not what people are thinking in terms of him being this big puncher. He's not unbeatable. I just couldn't show my boxing. He's an opponent, like my other opponents. Near the end of the fight, I opened up a bit, but there wasn't enough time."

Almost any excuse a fighter gives for losing will be torn apart on social media. That was the fate that befell MJ when his "warm-up excuse" leaked online. I'm a little more sympathetic. When you go through a 10- to 12-week training camp for the biggest fight of your career, you want everything to be perfect on fight night. Unfortunately, that doesn't always happen. And it must be said that Inoue had the same amount of warm-up time as MJ. The champ just settled quicker and was the better man on the night.

Akhmadaliev, 30, will continue fighting. When Inoue makes the almost inevitable move to featherweight, MJ will be in the running to vie for one of the vacant world titles at 122 pounds. He insisted that he'll be willing to take on "anyone" in his division when that moment comes.

As for Inoue, he moves one step closer to an all-Japanese showdown with fellow pound-for-pound star Junto Nakatani. However, before the biggest fight in Japanese boxing history can become a reality, The Monster must devour the WBC's No. 1 contender, Alan David Picasso, who is unbeaten in 33 fights. This bout, which headlines the Ring V card on December 27, will mark Inoue's Riyadh Season debut. RING

One Summer in Dublin, One Night in New York:

Hamzah Sheeraz Reinvents Himself

By Cormac O'Donnell

Riyadh, February 2025:

Hamzah Sheeraz is fighting for the WBC middleweight title against Carlos Adames. It's a glamour division that has housed some of the best to ever do it – Carlos Monzon, Marvelous Marvin Hagler, Bernard Hopkins, Gennadiy Golovkin.

Sheeraz wants to etch his name alongside the greats. He's torn through the division, captained the Queensberry team in the "5v5" card and is a Riyadh Season representative. He's the favorite going into this fight. Things couldn't be better.

Somewhere around Round 3, Hamzah breaks his hand. Houston, we have a problem. This isn't part of the plan. Adames starts to come on strong. The rocket ship is going to have to maintain a steady course and weather "a perfect storm," as described by nutritionist and cornerman Paul O'Neill, who was in the eye of it.

"It was a very big weight cut for Hamzah. We had the hand injury and a very good opponent. In the corner, we could've instructed Hamzah differently to try and change the fight."

In the 10th round, Turki Alalshikh comes over and tells him, "You're losing by two rounds." Not ideal. Sheeraz's team rallies the crowd in the final round to get behind him.

Frank Warren, ringside that night, remembers: "That was the night it didn't go his way. He was struggling. He'd banged up his hand and wasn't throwing it enough – I could see it. I remember running around to the ring, telling him he had to liven up. He was losing the fight. He got back into it but was very fortunate to get the draw."

Sheeraz receives a split decision draw as the internet cries foul in favor of Adames. The rocket comes crashing back to earth.

Hamzah is crushed. He changes his profile picture to pitch black – a digital full stop at the end of a nightmare. Back to the drawing board.

WBC titleholder Carlos Adames tested an injured Sheeraz to the limit.

Dubai, March 2025:

Hamzah has licked his wounds and is coming back up for air. The world didn't end. When things go completely sideways, there is a freedom in knowing things can't possibly get any worse. The only way is indeed up.

He moves to Dubai for sunnier days and observes Ramadan from February 28 to March 29. The holy month falls soon after the Adames draw – a perfect moment to reflect on personal growth. Clarity starts to set in. Sheeraz reflects and finds peace in stillness after the storm.

O'Neill comments: "You never welcome those dark moments in sport or life. But when you're through the other side, you're glad that you went through them, because it's where you've learned the most.

"He's got a really close family, and we're a really close team. We lean on each other. Being strong in our faiths – our individual faiths – is a big part for all of us also. You're glad you get those learning moments in life, and it's made Hamzah a stronger person and better boxer."

Dubai, April 2025:

Hamzah wants to get back on the saddle.

Alalshikh gives him a call and offers him the chance to headline "Ring III" in New York during the summer. The most influential man in boxing still believes in him. That helps.

Behind the scenes, Sheeraz sets about getting the team back together, albeit with some chopping and changing. Enter Andy Lee, replacing Ricky Funez as head trainer, and former middleweight contender Jason Quigley as his cornerman and training partner. O'Neill continues as nutritionist and cornerman.

Sheeraz starts doing the media rounds as these talking points emerge: He's moving up a weight class to campaign at super middleweight for a fresh coat of paint. Whispers start about a possible Edgar Berlanga fight. Despite a lackluster showing against Canelo Alvarez, "The Chosen One" can bang and is dangerous if he lands.

O'Neill observes: "It's one thing to be picked apart by a skillful fighter; it's another dealing with someone who could knock you out with one punch. That kept Hamzah switched on."

Ring III gets announced a week later, confirming the bout as a headliner for July 12 at Louis Armstrong Stadium in New York.

Dublin, May-June 2025:

In Kilbogget Park, south of Dublin, Ballybrack Boxing Club sits hidden among wire fences and rows of housing estates. It takes this writer several walkarounds to figure out which door to go in. "It's a bit of a fortress," admits Lee, laughing and jangling a set of keys. A perfect place for Sheeraz to keep his head down and get to work. Both the building and the Irish people have a no-nonsense approach, and Hamzah swiftly feels relaxed and content in Ireland. As Lee notes: "We had a wonderful camp. It was so easy."

Lee has emerged as a trainer who specializes in rejuvenating great fighters and guiding them back to winning ways – names like Tyson Fury, Joseph Parker and Ben Whittaker. He's just finished training for the day. Ballybrack has a stillness. It's like an isolation chamber.

Lee is soft-spoken as he describes a meeting of the minds with Sheeraz: "When I first met him, he was quiet, humble and focused. I could see the desire to improve in his whole demeanor." With Lee, it's less about reinventing the wheel and more about fine-tuning a fighter's strengths.

Sheeraz notes the different approach to training: "We were simplifying things – really stripped them back. It was my first camp with [Andy Lee] – he corrected mistakes and bad habits. I still made a few; you can't break them in one camp. For the time we had, I think what we did was efficient and it worked."

Lee recalls adjusting Hamzah's physical approach: "We worked on his posture – how his weight was distributed. Not on the front foot, but more on the back foot or central. And looking imposing, because he's a big fellow. When he stands up and spreads himself, he's not a target you want to attack. So we worked on the body language of when he's in the ring, and I think those were the changes that you could see in the Berlanga fight."

"Andy fit into the team," said O'Neill. "Their temperaments matched – they gelled instantly.

"The conversations [Hamzah] has with Andy, [who has been] a world champion and in championship fights himself, there's very few trainers in the world that ever achieve that. When they've been in exactly the same position you've been in – they've won the big trophies, they've lost the big trophies – when you can communicate with someone on that level, it elevated Hamzah to a different place. You could see that it helped change his demeanor and [he blossomed]."

Both Lee and Sheeraz have expressed their desire to maintain this partnership moving forward. "I think long and hard about the guys I do train because it's not just one fight. For me, if I start with something, I want to finish it and I want to see it out. So far, I've done that with all the fighters I've trained.

"You build the bonds because it is a close, intimate relationship between a fighter [and a trainer], and that's why I think for now I'm probably at the capacity of fighters I can train, because of that reason. It's not a conveyor belt."

Sheeraz reflects on the renewed strength of the team: "It comes with experience, having the right team around you. It all comes with honesty and integrity as well. When there's big numbers on the table, people change and take advantage. Now, I feel I've got the team that I'll finish my career with."

New York, July 2025:

Sheeraz arrives in the U.S. intent on leaving as the King of New York. Edgar Berlanga is just a pretender to dispatch.

At the press conference, Berlanga is running his mouth and points his finger into a gun sign. Packing enough heat in his own hands, it's water off a duck's back for Hamzah, who never rises to the tactics of his rival. Stoic Batman versus the manic Joker.

Sheeraz recalls the ease of fight week: "I felt good. I was moving up in weight, so there was no battle with the scales. I went into that fight with a point to prove. I was locked-in mentally. I enjoyed it a lot more than I ever have done before, to be fair. It didn't get tedious. Everything was new – especially the enhanced Ring card production."

A few days before the fight, he meets

with Alalshikh, who tells him, "You have to show me something."

"So I did," Sheeraz adds, matter-of-factly.

In a remarkable turn of events, Quigley – now Sheeraz's cornerman – faced Berlanga in New York himself, two years earlier. It was a defiant performance from Quigley, who was dropped several times by Berlanga but, in pure Donegal stubbornness, wouldn't lay down.

The situation is pure coincidence. Quigley just happens to work with Lee, who just happens to be training Sheeraz. It would almost have been rude not to play a cheeky mind game on Berlanga before the fight.

"I was there to be in the corner, but also to be in the changing room with Berlanga to check that the handwraps and the gloves were being done right," recalled Quigley. "There was a lot of controversy about that! I think Berlanga and them got a shock when they saw me walking in to check everything. We had a brief interaction – respectful enough, so it was."

Come fight night, Ilford's finest is decked out in Emerald Green for Pakistan – and perhaps a nod to his stay in Ireland and the names in his corner: Lee, O'Neill and Quigley.

There's an old-school feel to the night, punctuated by Jim Lampley commentating for the second time that summer. He exclaims, "Hamzah Sheeraz has long arms and big feet!" Terrific television.

Sheeraz stays in the middle of the ring, standing his ground. The stubborn Irish approach has rubbed off on him. He towers over Berlanga and doesn't retreat. Lessons learned in Ballybrack.

Both men are planting their feet in Round 2, literally going toe to toe. Hamzah's not moving from the center of the ring. This isn't a feeling-out round; Sheeraz is feeling himself.

In the corner, Lee tells him, "That's the best he's gonna get. That's the best he can do."

Berlanga, known for a bully approach, doesn't look remotely intimidating against Sheeraz. If anything, Hamzah seems to be growing taller in stature as the fight continues.

By Round 4, Sheeraz is splitting the guard of Berlanga and attacking his body in the same combination. Both fighters continue to press each other in close quarters. A flurry of hooks drops Berlanga. Sheeraz smells blood and drops him again – saved by the bell.

Sheeraz opens the fifth round with another clatter of hooks, and it's Goodnight Vienna. The referee waves it off as Hamzah jumps for joy, following it up with a prayer. Lee climbs over the ropes and lifts Hamzah like a toddler, carrying him with ease.

Berlanga, the big hitter, was hit back and could not recover.

The team is elated. The critics are silenced. Wrongs have been righted. This is pure cinema unfolding in real time. The King of New York has arrived.

Hamzah recalls that night: "It wasn't relief – it was achievement. I was back on track. All that shit-talking from the last few months was over. Everyone was back on the bandwagon again.

"It means a lot. God forbid I lost that fight – you'd be in a pickle. Most fighters take easier fights when moving up in weight – I went straight in with a dangerous opponent.

"It did a lot to skyrocket me back to the top."

Riyadh, August 2025:

Frank Warren of Queensberry Promotions (Hamzah's promoter) is in a Riyadh hotel room, reflecting on the fairy-tale of New York. We're discussing the upcoming Canelo Alverez vs. Terence Crawford fight and matching Sheeraz up with the victor. Both are Ring Magazine pound-for-pound top 10. Challenging either is a step up for Hamzah – and he may well be the underdog. Not for Frank.

"The best is still to come. He's got a good boxing brain, punch, and I feel he can do the business.

"Ricky Hatton fought Kostya Tszyu when he was pound-for-pound number one, and he went into that fight with not one person, not one journalist fancying him. Ricky did the job.

"When we put Joe Calzaghe in with Jeff Lacy, [Lacy was also a world titleholder] and the darling of the American network Showtime. Everybody thought he was the next big thing – and Joe Calzaghe did the job.

"I'm a big believer in timing and getting it right. Depending on how Canelo and Crawford look in September and if we get it right, I think Hamzah can go and emulate what those guys did."

Dubai, September 2025:

Hamzah looks set to face the winner of Canelo vs. Crawford but is somewhat surprised that the Omaha native won. "It didn't go as I expected," said Sheeraz. "I thought Canelo would go in and iron him out.

"Crawford showed his levels. He showed what he does best and how exactly he does it. It was an honor to sit there ringside and watch both of them go at it, knowing that I could potentially fight the winner.

"I think if Crawford stays at 168, I'm the only fight that makes sense for him.

"Two arms, two legs – that's the way I'd approach it. I'd be very relaxed and in the zone, all about business. Now that I've been at that big, big level twice, I've got the experience.

"If he decides to vacate, I'm straight in line to fight for the WBC [super middleweight] title, which I believe would be against Christian Mbilli.

"I just gotta sit back, be patient and see what happens."

For Sheeraz, the chaos of the past year has crystallized into maturity. In February, the draw with Adames felt like a fall from orbit, but in truth it was the gravitational pull that forced him to rebuild stronger foundations.

Ireland gave him grounding, New York gave him redemption, and a future fight in Riyadh against generational great Terence Crawford offers him the chance to fully realize his potential.

Sheeraz's 2025 was about choosing faith over fear. Whether it's Crawford or Mbilli next, Hamzah Sheeraz knows the path is no longer about reaching the stars in a rocket ship, but about walking steadily toward greatness with both feet on the ground. The reinvention is complete. The next chapter is ready to be written. RING

FUNDAMENTALS

By Michael Rosenthal

FORGOTTEN CLASSIC

Marco Antonio Barrera TKO 12 Kennedy McKinney

» Feb. 3, 1996, Great Western Forum, Inglewood, California

HBO officials couldn't have been more fortunate when they chose the first main event for its new series *Boxing After Dark*.

Barrera, only 22, had yet to become a major star, but he'd won his first title and was building a reputation as an exciting attraction on the West Coast, particularly as part of Forum Boxing. McKinney, 30, won a gold medal at the 1988 Olympics and would go on to have a successful professional career, reigning twice as a 122-pound titleholder. He was an excellent technician but wasn't afraid to stand his ground and fight, as fans nationwide found out almost 30 years ago at the home of the Los Angeles Lakers.

McKinney, trying to take Barrera's WBO junior featherweight belt, boxed well for half of a close, fast-paced fight. However, by the middle rounds, the bout had evolved into a firefight. And that played into the hands of the Mexican slugger, who got the better of fierce exchanges and gradually wore McKinney down physically. The problem for the champion? McKinney bravely refused to give up, which turned a good fight into a great one down the stretch.

The American was hurt badly and went down twice in the eighth round, when he seemed to be finished but somehow survived on wobbly legs. McKinney hit the canvas again in the ninth. And again he heard the bell to end the round. He even scored a knockdown in the 11th, when Barrera took a punch and his glove touched the canvas. Finally, in the 12th and final round, McKinney could take no more. He went down from a barrage of hard shots, and referee Pat Russell saved him from himself by stopping the fight with 55 seconds to go.

The fans and HBO audience had witnessed what they hope to see every time they sit down to watch a bout: two skillful, well-prepared boxers who leave all they have in the ring. As Hall of Fame analyst Larry Merchant put it, "Folks, this is about as good as it gets!"

Jod Jacobsohn

LOST FIGHT

Benny Leonard KO 9 Charley White

» July 5, 1920, Floyd Fitzsimmons Arena, Benton Harbor, Michigan

Jack Dempsey isn't the only great fighter to get knocked out of the ring only to climb back in and score an impressive victory.

Leonard, arguably the greatest lightweight of all time, was in the middle of his legendary seven-plus-year championship reign when the New Yorker faced the highly regarded White about a two-hour drive from White's hometown of Chicago.

At 24 years old, Leonard was a superb technician who legend tells us was so good defensively that he could do battle without disturbing a single strand of his perfectly combed hair. And, as White would discover firsthand, "The Ghetto Wizard" could punch. Meanwhile, White, 29, also was an excellent boxer known for a lethal left hook, as Leonard would learn midway through the scheduled 10-round classic.

In what had been a competitive fight, the most memorable moment came in the fifth round, when White landed his signature punch and followed with four right hands that drove Leonard to the ropes. It was then, according to a contemporary report in the Tulsa Daily World, that White "half pushed and [half] knocked Leonard through the ropes for a count of four."

Then, after spectators lifted Leonard back into the ring, White made a fatal mistake: He failed to go in for the kill, which allowed Leonard to survive the round and regroup. As famed boxing writer Hype Igoe reportedly wrote at the time, White "is like the artist who can't resist the temptation of stepping back and admiring his incompleted work."

It was largely downhill for White after that. And although White held his own for a few more rounds, the champion's superior pedigree ultimately led to a horrific ending for the Chicagoan. White went down five times in the ninth round. He was lying on his face when he was counted out, concluding one of the wildest fights of the era.

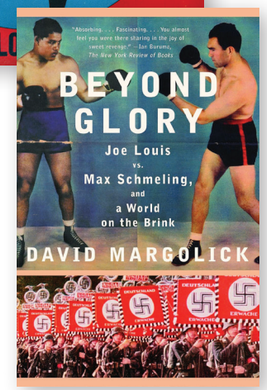
Leonard would reign for four more years, adding to his reputation as an all-time great. White tangled with many of the top 135-pounders over a successful career but – largely because of Leonard – never became a champion.

MUST READ

Beyond Glory: Joe Louis vs. Max Schmeling and a World on the Brink, by David Margolick

Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group (2005)

Joe Louis vs. Max Schmeling II is probably the most important fight in the history of boxing. The significance of the bout and Margolick's ability to turn real events into a riveting page-turner make this book one of the best of its kind.



Of course, the 1938 matchup for Louis' heavyweight championship had a compelling backstory from a boxing perspective. Schmeling, a wily veteran from Germany, stunned Louis and the boxing world by knocking out the then-22-year-old juggernaut in 1936. Louis would go on to win the world title but made it clear that he wouldn't see himself as the champion until he avenged the setback against Schmeling. He got his chance at Yankee Stadium.

That was only part of the remarkable story, however. The matchup became a Good (Louis) vs. Evil (Schmeling) tale because of the timing and their countries of birth. By 1938, the world was beginning to understand the sinister nature of Adolf Hitler's Third Reich, which would soon spark the deadliest war in history and the Holocaust. Schmeling was no Nazi, but he was held up as an example of Aryan superiority, particularly after the earlier knockout of Louis. Meanwhile, the soft-spoken Louis became a symbol of democracy – and decency – in the burgeoning battle with fascism in spite of his own second-class status as an African American in the U.S.

So when Louis met Schmeling a second time, a record 100 million people or more worldwide, captivated by the significance of the event, sat by their radios to listen. The action didn't last long, as Louis, the far superior fighter by this time, needed less than a full round to destroy Schmeling and embarrass the Nazis. No fight before or since has resonated with more people.

And it all comes to life in Margolick's masterful work. Author Joyce Carol Oates, who herself wrote prolifically about boxing, said *Beyond Glory* probably would become the definitive account of the event. That rings true. RING

NAOYA INOUE VS. WILLIE PEP

A FANTASY FIGHT

FOR THE UNDISPUTED FEATHERWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP

By Ron Lipton

Ron Lipton was inducted into the New York State and New Jersey Boxing Halls of Fame as a veteran pro referee, boxing historian and record-setting amateur boxer. He was a paid sparring partner to Rubin "Hurricane" Carter, Dick Tiger, Carlos Ortiz and even Muhammad Ali, a lifelong friend, as well as top contenders of the 1960s.

Lipton is proud to present the latest installment of his Mythical Matchup series for The Ring.

In this mythical matchup, I am matching these two phenomenal fighters at a fictional moment in time when their records and skills are at their zenith. With Willie Pep, it would be on the night of February 11, 1949, when he outpointed Sandy Saddler over 15 rounds for the featherweight championship of the world. For Naoya Inoue, it would be September 14, 2025, when he outclassed respected former unified beltholder Murodjon Akhmadaliev over 12 rounds to defend his undisputed junior featherweight championship.

Pep, regarded as the greatest 126-pounder of all time, is going up against a modern-day master who has electrified the boxing world with his skills and punching power while amassing titles in four divisions.

An abundance of creative license will be taken! The overall records of both fighters are different from the "zenith" versions (drastically in Pep's case), but for dramatic purposes, Pep's final career record and Inoue's record to this date will be announced, and references may be made to events from any time in their careers. Also, this fight is being presented as a **"mythical rematch"** of a fight that took place eight months earlier in Japan, in which **Inoue stopped Pep** in the 10th round to win the undisputed featherweight championship. Finally, historical boxing figures from different eras will be placed in the story for your enjoyment.

WILLIE PEP

- **Born:** September 11, 1922, in Middletown, Connecticut
- **Birth name:** Guglielmo Papaleo
- **Nickname:** "Will o' the Wisp"
- **Died:** November 23, 2006
- **Height, reach:** 5-foot-5, 68 inches
- **Stance:** Orthodox
- **Career record:** 229-11-1 (65 KOs)
- **Titles held:** Ring, NBA, NYSAC featherweight
- **Ring Magazine Fighter of the Year:** 1945

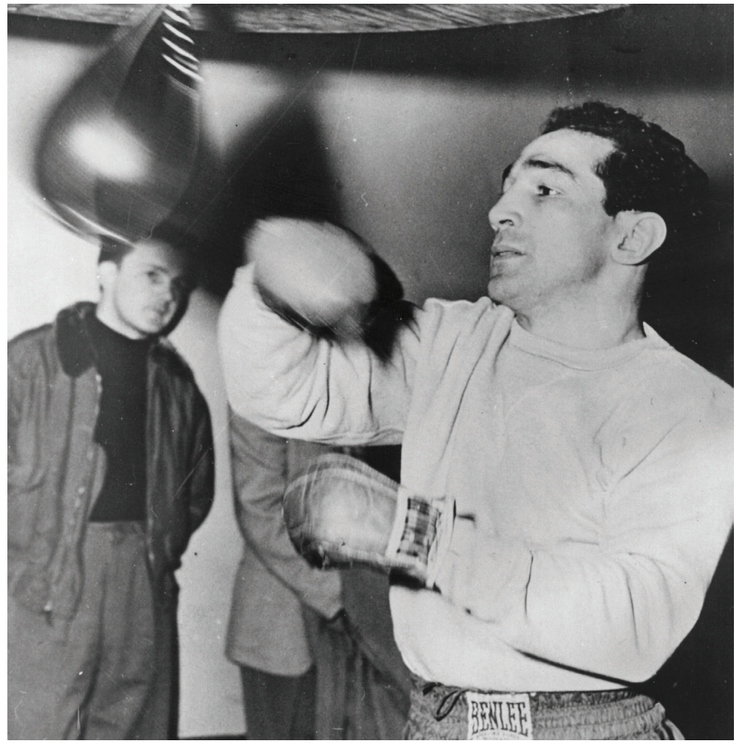
Pep fought a total of 1,954 rounds in his 26-year career, retiring at age 43. He won his first 62 pro fights before losing to Sammy Angott in 1943, then went loss-free for another 72 fights before getting knocked out by Saddler in 1948. The last 25 fights of that streak came after Pep sustained serious injuries in a plane crash, which kept him out of the ring for only six months. He was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 1990.

STRENGTHS: One-of-a-kind boxing skills, uncanny hand and foot speed, elusiveness and ring generalship. He was an accurate puncher who could land from any angle on the move. Also, he was a fearless, tough and resilient fighter who knew every boxing move in the book, and he was a seasoned 15-round fighter with the stamina and grit to fight often and go the distance against the best in the business.

WEAKNESSES: Lack of punching power.

NAOYA INOUE 井上尚弥

- **Born:** April 10, 1993, Zama, Kanagawa, Japan
- **Nickname:** "The Monster"
- **Height, reach:** 5-foot-5, 67½ inches
- **Stance:** Orthodox
- **Record:** 31-0 (27 KOs)
- **Titles held:** WBC junior flyweight, WBO junior bantamweight, Ring/IBF/WBA/WBC/WBO bantamweight, Ring/IBF/WBA/WBC/WBO junior featherweight
- **Ring Magazine Fighter of the Year:** 2023



Inoue is the extremely rare fighter who has become an undisputed champion in two weight divisions. He is known for a crowd-pleasing style that combines fantastic boxing skills with crushing power and a desire to use it. His dedication to his training regimen is also reminiscent of the hardest-training fighters in boxing history.

STRENGTHS: Precise, accurate punching power to the head and body, great stamina, fierce determination, always at championship-level condition. His systematic breakdown of his opponents is reminiscent of Julio Cesar Chavez's brutal short punches, thrown with accuracy and finesse.

WEAKNESSES: So far in his pro career, there are no glaring weaknesses, except for perhaps a tendency to leave himself open sometimes. He was dropped by Ramon Cardenas and Luis Nery, but it only seemed to energize him.

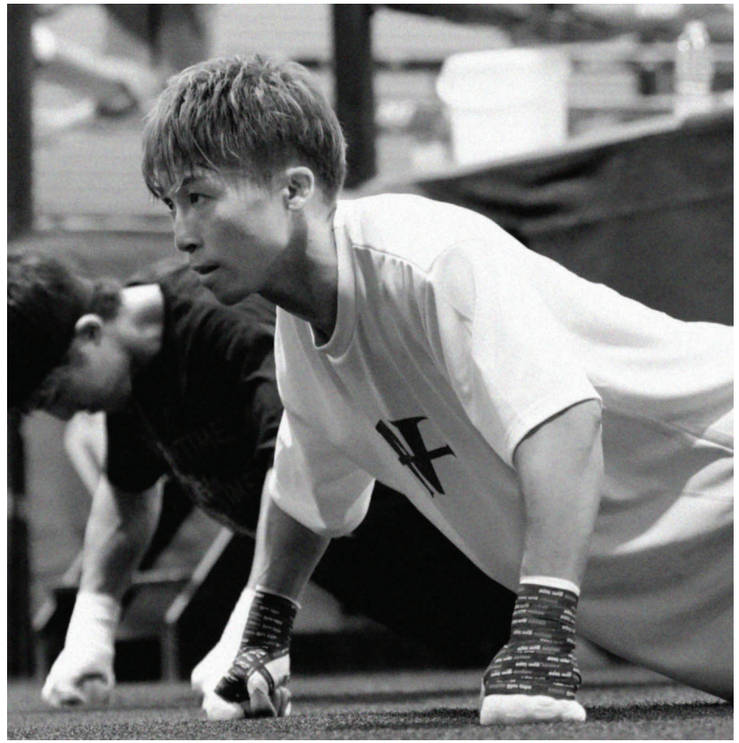
PRE-FIGHT EVENTS:

Word reached the boxing world that a rematch between Naoya Inoue and Willie Pep was in the works. It had been eight months since Inoue shocked the boxing world by stopping Pep in the 10th round of a brutal fight held in Japan for all the featherweight belts.

The consensus was that Pep had underestimated Inoue. Pep was quoted as saying before their first fight, "This kid has had only 30 fights. When I was 22 years old, I had 100 pro bouts."

Before their fight, when pressed by boxing writers who kept bringing up Inoue's punching power, Pep's retort at the time was to point out that The Ring Magazine had rated Saddler as the third-hardest puncher of all time.

After Inoue vs. Pep 1, one reporter asked Pep in his dressing room to compare the punching power of Saddler to Inoue. Pep said, "Let's just say getting hit by Sandy Saddler is like getting hit with a brick at the end of a rope. With Inoue, it's like getting shot."



Two iconic fighters from the lower weight classes prepare for battle.

Pep had agreed to fight Inoue in Japan with a rematch clause in effect. Once there, he had complained about the long plane ride. "After my plane accident, I was a nervous wreck spending that amount of time in any plane," said Pep. "I never got over the tension of it.

"I am not making excuses. Inoue was in great shape and he hurt me to the body throughout the fight. He had me down three times before the ref stopped it in the 10th.

"Despite all that, one judge had me winning up until the 10th. The other two gave it to him, but I couldn't breathe. He broke a couple of my ribs and caught me with that liver shot. I got up, didn't I, but the ref stopped it. I underestimated him. It won't happen again. This time I am not taking any long plane rides for this fight."

When the press played up the fact that Pep was ahead on one judge's scorecard with his brilliant display of boxing guile going into the 10th round, a rematch was not a hard sell.

Turki Alalshikh wanted the fight in Saudi Arabia but graciously understood Pep's request to have it in Madison Square Garden and agreed to promote the fight there.

Two months before the rematch, Jake LaMotta and Rocky Graziano sat together in a bar that Pep had an interest in on 7th Avenue in Manhattan. They had just left a fight show at Madison Square Garden and were discussing Inoue's stoppage of Pep.

Rocky says, "Willie got hurt bad last time with this kid. He better get tougher this time."

LaMotta responds: "Tougher? Think of where you're sitting right now? This is the place where Pep chased me the fuck out of here because he didn't want any fighting in his joint. He came after me from behind the bar like a maniac with his ass on fire, swinging a golf club at my head after I flattened that guy who kept bothering me. Some reporter wrote up the incident. I love Willie, so I let it slide.

"Push the wrong button on Pep and he will be glad to show anybody how tough he is. He's got a temper that makes me look like a choirboy. He is as tough as they come, Rock. You know that."

"OK," responds Graziano. "Then he has to toughen up his body more to take this kid's body shots and then do his usual job on the guy of hit-and-don't-get-hit, but faster this time. I'll talk to Willie, Bill Gore, Ray Arcel and Lou Viscusi, because this guy Inoue seems stronger than Saddler was. Pep has to do something different; he looks too frail sometimes, relying just on speed.

"He has to put some more juice on his shots, put some kind of hurt on Inoue so he doesn't walk through him all night."

LaMotta says, "Yeah, I agree. More power without losing any speed on the move and keep boxing him for 12 rounds like before – without eating too many of this guy's body shots. I lost a lot of dough on that fight, and I want it back with a big win for Willie.

"I know just who to see if he will do it, if Willie and his corner agree to one or two more specialized trainers for him in camp."

Pep is leaving the Du-Well Athletic Club in Norwich, Connecticut, where he is training for the fight, when he sees two hard-looking guys leaning on his car with their backs to him.

"Get off my fucking car." He hears them both laughing. Pep rushes up to them with his fists clenched. "You think this is funny?"

Graziano turns around. "You going

to mess up those hands so we lose more money on you this time?" Pep is stunned for a moment as LaMotta turns around in a fighting stance. He says with a twinkle in his eye, "I shoulda brought a golf club with me this time."

They break out laughing and Pep embraces them both. Rocky says, "We love you, pal, but we need to talk."

Rocky adds, "I know you can do the job on this guy, but we have to be realistic, and I want you to promise me you will run this by Bill, Lou and Ray. No one is going to jeopardize your speed and footwork magic, but for this fight you need some more punching power and a stronger midsection besides the regular sit-up routines.

"I can pull in a couple of favors and bring in two guys to add to your camp who will give you a gift that you don't have for this fight."

"Like what?" says Pep. "A one-night stand with a ring card girl?"

Graziano and LaMotta grab him in a playful headlock.

Graziano: "No, Errol Flynn. They will add some T.N.T. to your other skills, and you need it for this fight like Dracula needs blood."

Jake says, "Trust us, Willie.

"I want you to talk with these two guys to fit in a couple new type of punches you can pull the trigger with, if the chance shows itself.

"You need a sneaky, one-hitter quitter to pull out of nowhere during the fight," LaMotta continues. "Will you at least listen to them? They also have a new ball-busting ab routine for you to give you a bulletproof gut. Just do it, because you will need it this time, Willie."

Pep, "OK, thanks for caring. Just let me know when they are coming to see me."

The next day, Pep emerges from the gym and nods to the assemblage of Arcel, Gore and Viscusi. "All done," he says.

In his hourlong private session, Pep had been given an arduous new abdominal routine that included hanging leg raises, rope crunches and incline sit-ups with dumbbells. He'd been assigned more wind sprints up hills, neck exercises and sledgehammer work on a tire, and he'd learned one-shot power drills from all angles with both hands.

The advice he'd received from the two mystery trainers boiled down to this: "Nothing we showed you, nothing we practiced will in any way interfere with your style or game plan, but now you have two different punches and how to deliver them in your arsenal. Only you can choose the time to pull the trigger with them in the fight."

The door to the gym opens again, and Archie Moore steps into the parking lot, followed by Rubin "Hurricane" Carter. They offer a quick goodbye and a wink to Pep's team, then depart.

OHASHI GYM, YOKOHAMA, JAPAN

Inoue has finished a brutal workout and is now sitting with his father, Shingo, his brother Takuma and cousin Koki, along with assistant trainer Daisuke Okabe. They are studying videos of Willie Pep. The moments they key in on are from the Saddler fights: knockdowns and stoppages in Pep's losses and the way he stayed in motion and punched on the move in his only win against Saddler.

Shingo says to his son, "Now you see why I had you throwing your most damaging punches on the move without setting yourself in mid-ring. Once you have him in a corner, then sit down on the shots in combinations of three. He will still spin out, but he will be hurt and be slower.

"No matter how many times he hit Saddler, he did not hurt him enough to drop him, but he does cause facial damage with his hand speed.

"I am not worried about his ability to hurt you – only outpoint you. And we must prevent that."

The lavish final press conference is uneventful, with even the face-off being brief and without any kind of malevolent staredown. The fight is selling itself.

The next day, Inoue weighs in at 125¼ pounds while Pep makes 126 on the nose. This time, the old-school Will o' the Wisp stares coldly into Inoue's eyes and is met with an equally intense focus.

They pull away on command, shake hands and leave the podium.

FIGHT NIGHT AT MADISON SQUARE GARDEN:

The arena has been filled to capacity since the opening prelims.

We are now down to the main event. At ringside sit the color commentators: Randy Gordon, Al Bernstein and Bert Randolph Sugar.

Bernstein is the first to comment on the air: "Tonight we are going to see if Willie Pep can bring anything different to this fight and if the first fight has taken too much out of him."

Gordon: "It all depends on which Willie Pep shows up tonight. If the Pep that lost to Sandy Saddler and then was reborn enough to outpoint Sandy in one of the most amazing displays of ring craft is here tonight, we could see a big upset, as Inoue is favored by odds of 11 to 5."

Sugar: "We all saw Pep vs. Inoue 1, and one judge had Pep outpointing him, but he suffered three brutal knockdowns before that stoppage. That kind of punishment would take the wind out of anyone's sails for a long time. But with Pep, he is capable of greatness on any given night. We will see. Here we go!"

The Garden's lights dim and then focus on the aisle near one side of the arena. Pat Benatar's "Hit Me With Your Best Shot" blasts through the Garden as the crowd cheers wildly. And HERE COMES PEP, resplendent in a black hooded robe, jogging toward the ring throwing punches in the air.

He is sandwiched between Arcel and Gore with LaMotta, Graziano, Viscusi and Jacob "Stitch" Duran in tow. Moore and Carter are already on the ring apron holding the ropes open for Pep and his team.

Pep darts up the stairs and through the ropes with the grace of a dancer and immediately starts throwing fast punches. He glides around the ring as smoothly as if he were on ice skates to the delight of all the old-time boxers in the audience – they are starting to feel the magic.

Now the spotlights are on the other aisle and AC/DC's "Big Gun" is blasting.

Inoue comes down the aisle to an incredible MSG reception. He is flanked by two of the greatest Japanese fighters of all time – former flyweight and bantamweight champion Masahiko "Fighting" Harada and former flyweight champion Hiroyuki Ebihara. Inoue's father, Takuma and Koki are with them, as are assistant trainers Okabe and former Ring flyweight champ Akira Yaegashi.

He is adorned with a beautiful blue and gold velvet robe as he walks slowly to the ring. The crowd reaches out to touch him, and he reciprocates with a light touch of his glove and a firm nod of his head, yet his face remains a stoic, stern mask of deadly focus.

He gets into the ring and proceeds to throw lightning-fast bursts of uppercuts with a finishing vicious left hook that cuts through the air like a scythe to the appreciative roar of his fans.

The sound of the bell quiets the crowd.

Ring announcer David Diamante booms: "LADIES AND GENTLEMEN AND FIGHT FANS AROUND THE WORLD, ARE YOU READY? THE FIGHT! STARTS! NOW!!!

"Twelve rounds of boxing scheduled for the undisputed IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO and Ring Magazine featherweight championship of the world.

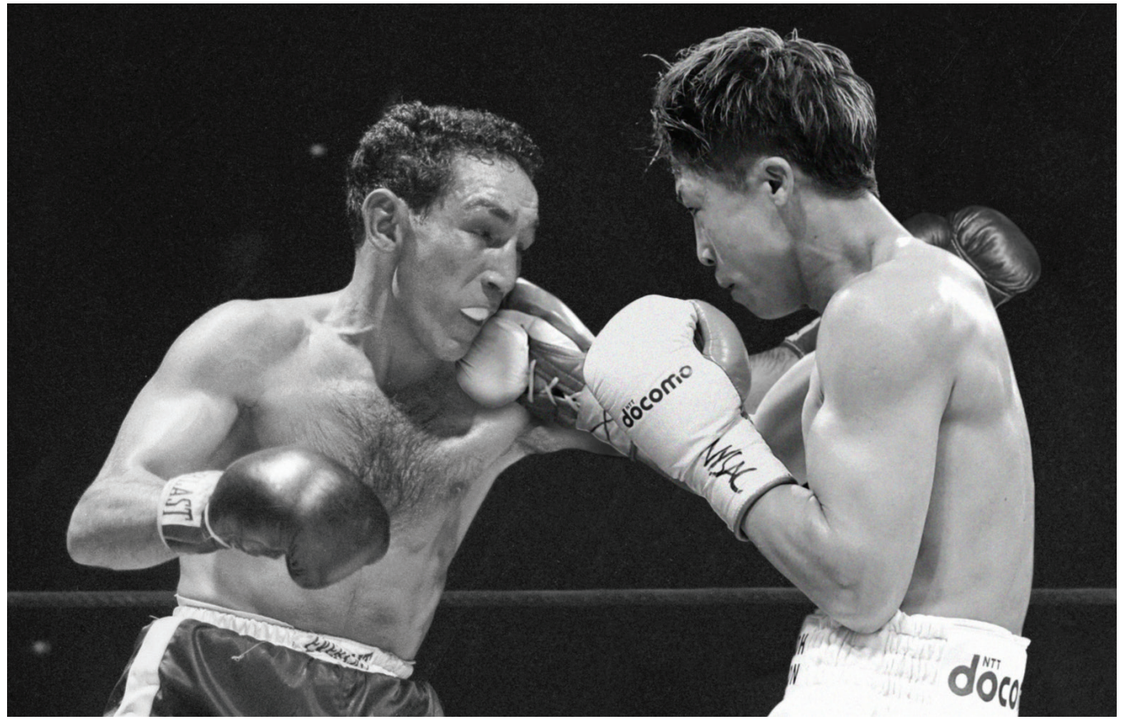
"The three judges scoring this bout are Harold Lederman, John McKaie and Tony Castellano. Your referee is Ray Miller.

"Introducing first, fighting out of the blue corner, wearing the purple trunks, he scaled 126 pounds, bang on. His professional record, an astounding and legendary one: 229 wins, 11 losses and one draw with 65 knockouts. Hailing from Hartford, Connecticut, the former undisputed featherweight champion of the world, hailed by many as the greatest featherweight champion of all time, THE WILL O' THE WISP, … WILLIE PEP! Pep!"

The resounding applause rocks the Garden in appreciation for the legend who stands in the ring. Pep holds both hands aloft, but his face and eyes are locked in with frozen concentration.

Arcel removes Pep's robe and he looks to be in the best shape of his career, his back muscles and abs rippling under the bright ring lights.

Diamante continues: "Now introducing his opponent, fighting out of the red corner wearing the blue and gold trunks and weighing in at 125¼



pounds, with an outstanding record of 31 wins with 27 knockouts. The former junior flyweight champion of the world, the former junior bantamweight champion of the world, the former undisputed bantamweight champion of the world, the former undisputed junior featherweight champion of the world, and the reigning undisputed, undefeated Ring Magazine, IBF, WBA, WBC and WBO featherweight champion NAOYA 'MONSTER' INOUE! Inoue!"

The applause majestically erupts in waves from the packed Garden crowd, which includes a large number of Japanese fans who made the trip to support Inoue.

His father removes his robe and the crowd can now see the phenomenal condition Naoya has achieved. He looks like he is carved out of marble.

Referee Miller comes to the center of the ring and beckons the fighters and their chief seconds in.

Pep, Gore, Inoue and his father come to center ring.

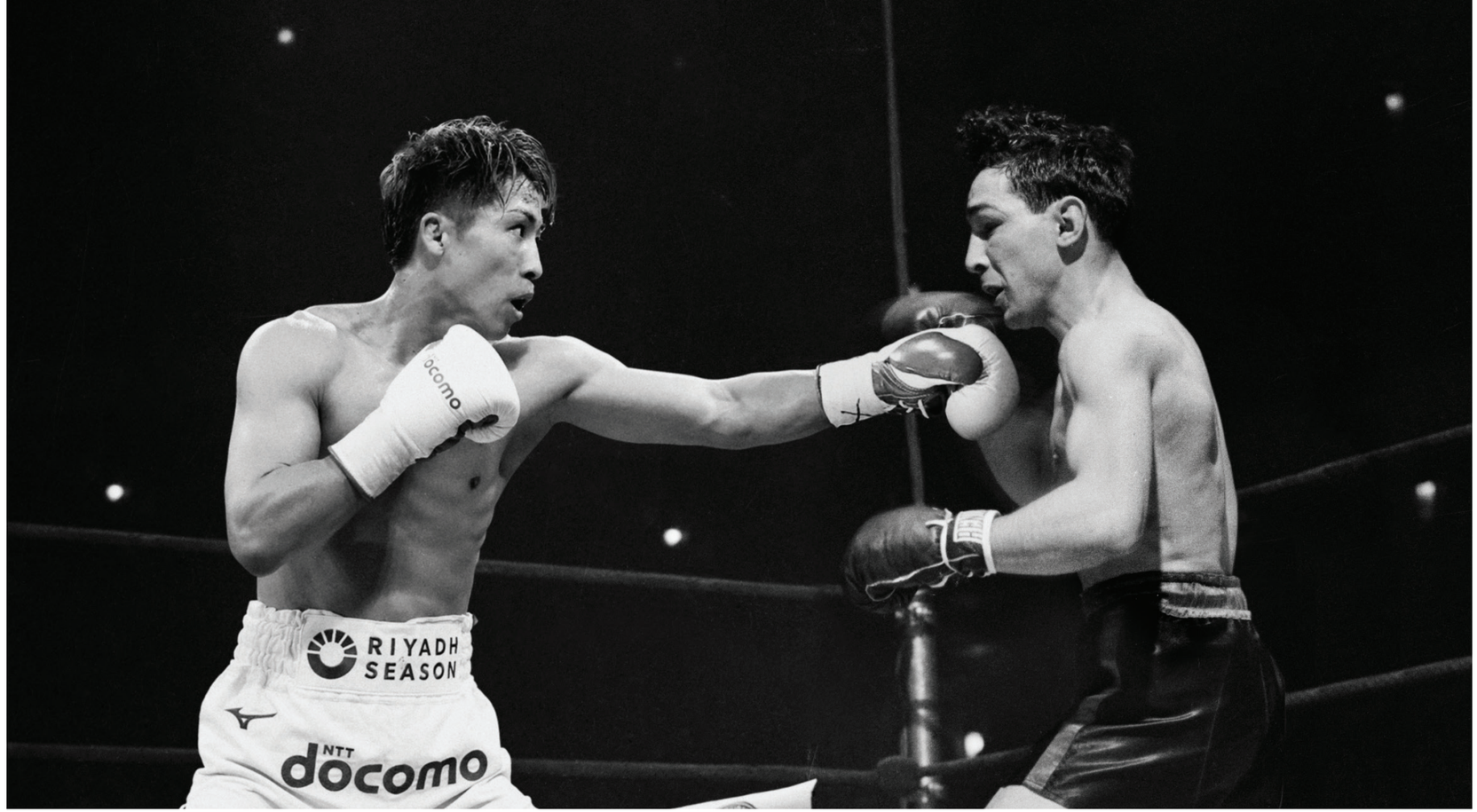
After giving instructions on legal punches and knockdown procedures, Miller turns to Pep and says, "Buona fortuna," then turns to Inoue and says, "Ganbatte. Touch gloves and come out fighting at the bell."

The fighters go to their respective corners and Miller gestures to the timekeeper: "Time!"

ROUND 1

Inoue comes out hands high and stalking. Pep circles him and steps in with two left jabs that score between the gloves. Inoue jabs back but falls short. Pep is already quickly darting side-to-side. Inoue is cutting off the ring and is throwing crisp shots to the head and body on the move but is missing the gliding Pep. Each time Inoue throws a punch, Pep is countering like a matador. Inoue catches Pep with a blistering left hook/half uppercut aimed at the midsection, but it hits Pep's arms and knocks him back three steps. The bell rings.

10-9 Pep.



Gordon: "Wow. Pep is not running but is making him miss by inches. Amazing."

Sugar: "Impressive. We'll see if he can keep this up for 12 rounds. But right now, that was perfect boxing."

Bernstein: "Gentleman Jim vs. John L. Sullivan so far, or should I say Errol Flynn vs. Ward Bond?"

ROUND 2

Pep comes out with more lateral movement and now, remarkably, is attacking Inoue and landing lighting-fast punches, in and out. Pep's corner is screaming at him to keep boxing. In one exchange, Inoue nails Pep to the body and lands a short left hook and right hand to the head. Pep turned with the shots but was driven back and visibly winced – even though he blocked the body shot, it hurt him. Pep is still gliding around the ring like a ghost on the move, landing punches. Inoue shows some faster footwork and traps Pep in a corner, landing a fusillade of punches that sound like explosions of leather. Pep spins out, but Naoya cuts him off and starts laying bombs on him. Pep still manages to spin out and duck, then comes back with quick combinations that surprise Inoue, whose face has noticeably reddened. Pep's right side is also red from the left hooks he took in the corner. There's the bell.

10-9 Pep.

In Pep's corner, Arcel and Gore plead with Willie to keep his distance and not trade with Inoue. According to the Japanese interpreter, Shingo Inoue is telling Naoya to take his time and catch Pep in an exchange, rather than lead, and also to keep hurting him to the body.

ROUND 3

Pep is on the move again, darting in and out and side to side. He's throwing fast and accurate but light punches that are landing on Inoue between and around his gloves. Inoue is visibly getting frustrated and is throwing straight, hard shots while moving forward. Finally, he lands the left jab-right hand combo to the jaw he has been trying for. Pep is wobbled, but he saw the shots coming and nullifies most of Inoue's follow-up as he rushes in for the kill. Pep feigns dropping his hands as he takes a step backward, and Inoue steps in carelessly, not fearing any power from Pep. Then Pep springs the trap and throws the two punches he worked on with Moore and Carter – two shots he never threw in his entire career: a perfectly timed right hand with a full shoulder snap, body dip, then a vicious, full-turn pivot left hook. Both land with tremendous snap on Inoue's jaw, catching him by surprise. He goes down hard, not knowing what hit him. Pep flies to a neutral corner as Miller begins the count. Inoue arises at seven. The bell rings.

The Garden is in shock. Collective bedlam has erupted at seeing the light-punching Willie Pep scoring a knockdown over "The Monster." Inoue still looks strong going back to his corner and seems more surprised than hurt.

10-8 Pep.

The commentators are almost at a loss for words, and the crowd is screaming so loud that no one watching the broadcast can hear them anyway.

In Inoue's corner, Shingo is as calm and clear as a mountain lake as he works on his son, reminding him what he did to Cardenas and Nery after suffering knockdowns in those bouts.

Arcel says to Pep, "Whatever Archie and Rubin did with you just paid off like a golden slot machine. Damn, Willie, you put 10 years on my life seeing that."

ROUND 4

Inoue, coming out hell-bent for leather, kicks his footwork into high gear and cuts the ring off on the stick-and-move specialist. Pep tries to adjust and has increased his foot speed and lateral movement, but Inoue has taken up the slack and closes the distance. He catches Willie on the turn with a left hook to the jaw, then follows it up with brutal combinations as Pep fades back against the ropes. The crowd is on its feet, sensing a KO, only to have Pep tie Inoue up, spin out and land a one-two on the way out the door. Inoue is effectively following him with short half-steps, and he is landing more welt-raising punches on Pep's shoulders and arms. Despite the onslaught, Pep is fighting the fight of his life and retaliates with blazing hand speed, poking Inoue with lead right hands and one-twos to keep him off-balance. There's the bell.

10-9 Inoue.

The commentators all agree that Pep is up three rounds to one.

ROUND 5

Pep and Inoue answer the bell slowly and meet in mid-ring, but neither one is showing the slightest signs of fatigue. Inoue keeps stalking with finesse and is stepping in with a hard jab, but his follow-up right hands and left hooks are either nullified, ducked or slipped while Pep is darting in and out and capitalizing on Inoue's missed punches. Pep is landing more and more on the move with accurate flurries and is becoming more bold with Inoue. He leads with a stabbing right, then pivots, but Inoue catches him with a

crisp right hand that stuns Pep as he's off-balance. He slips to one knee but bounces up immediately after his glove touches the canvas. Miller rules no knockdown, which draws a wild series of boos from the crowd and hard criticism from the three commentators, who all feel it was a legit knockdown.

Pep outscores Inoue in the closing minute to take the round in questionable fashion

10-9 Pep (to the objection of the crowd).

The commentators are watching the replays during the one-minute rest time.

Gordon: "That was a knockdown, because Pep was hit with a right hand that landed and his glove touched the canvas." Bernstein and Sugar agree.

Inoue's corner protests vigorously, but the ref's ruling stands.

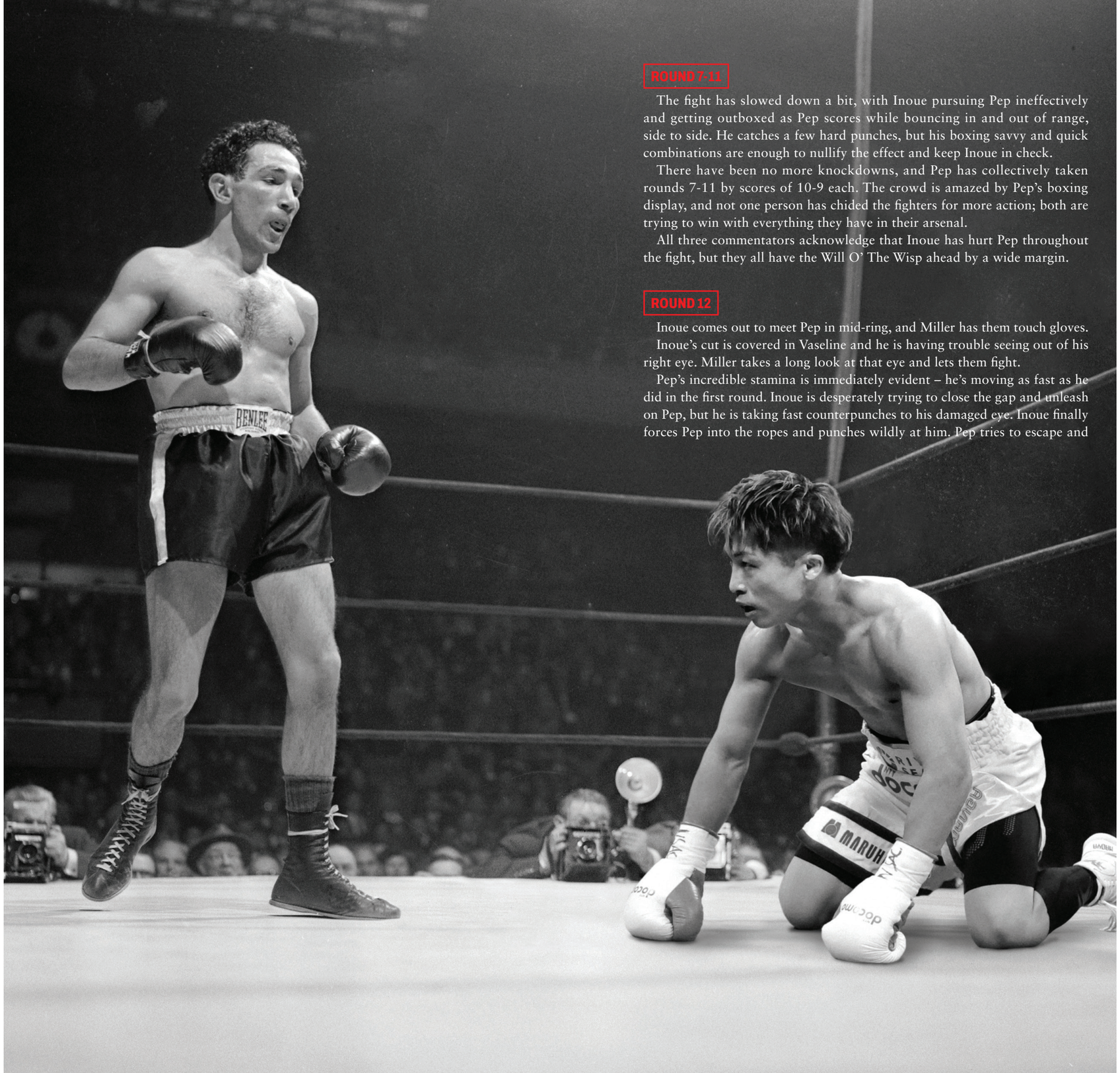
ROUND 6

Inoue comes out totally invested in the destruction of Pep. He goes all out to rip shots at anything he can hit on Pep's body. Willie is countering with all the speed and guile he can muster, but he is getting blasted, and his courage and resolve draw applause from the crowd. In one exchange, Pep, fighting for his life, lands the type of hard, chopping right hand and dynamite left hook that dropped Inoue earlier, and the combo opens a cut near Naoya's right eye. In retaliation, he drops Pep with his own left hook and runs to a neutral corner. Bleeding profusely, he waits as Miller counts over Pep, who is hurt but is in the best shape of his life and arises at eight. The bell rings and Pep walks back to his corner – still a bit stunned, but sturdy.

10-8 Inoue.

In Inoue's corner, his father works on the cut. The ring doctor examines Inoue and lets the fight continue.

In Pep's corner, he is told not to trade anything with Inoue again if he wants to win. Do a paint job on him for the rest of the fight. Pep nods his head in agreement.



ROUND 7-11

The fight has slowed down a bit, with Inoue pursuing Pep ineffectively and getting outboxed as Pep scores while bouncing in and out of range, side to side. He catches a few hard punches, but his boxing savvy and quick combinations are enough to nullify the effect and keep Inoue in check.

There have been no more knockdowns, and Pep has collectively taken rounds 7-11 by scores of 10-9 each. The crowd is amazed by Pep's boxing display, and not one person has chided the fighters for more action; both are trying to win with everything they have in their arsenal.

All three commentators acknowledge that Inoue has hurt Pep throughout the fight, but they all have the Will O' The Wisp ahead by a wide margin.

ROUND 12

Inoue comes out to meet Pep in mid-ring, and Miller has them touch gloves.

Inoue's cut is covered in Vaseline and he is having trouble seeing out of his right eye. Miller takes a long look at that eye and lets them fight.

Pep's incredible stamina is immediately evident – he's moving as fast as he did in the first round. Inoue is desperately trying to close the gap and unleash on Pep, but he is taking fast counterpunches to his damaged eye. Inoue finally forces Pep into the ropes and punches wildly at him. Pep tries to escape and Inoue grabs him and throws him back.

Miller stops the action for the first time and warns Inoue about rough tactics. Inoue acknowledges the infraction and the fight resumes.

Pep is going after that cut eye with jabs and fast one-twos from all angles, opening up the cut again. It's bleeding badly. Inoue hurts Pep with a vicious left hook to the body and catches another one-two from Pep, who is still on the move. The blood is pouring down Inoue's chest as he hurts Pep one last time with a right hand at the bell.

10-9 Pep.

The crowd is on its feet, cheering wildly for both fighters as the doctor administers to Inoue in his corner.

Pep is hoisted onto Gore's shoulders and is paraded around the ring. Inoue's corner is reserved and quiet while awaiting the official decision.

Diamante signals for the bell to be rung three times after examining the scorecard results.

"Ladies and gentlemen, after 12 rounds of championship boxing, how about a hand for both of these warriors." The Garden crowd responds with applause and affection for both of them. "We have a unanimous decision. All three judges – John McKaie, Harold Lederman and Tony Castellano – all score the fight 117-109 for the winner … and new featherweight champion of the world, Willie Pep!"

The crowd approves of the decision, with only a few dissenters among Inoue's loyal fans.

Randy Gordon is now up in the ring with Willie Pep. "Congratulations, Willie, on a superb display of championship boxing."

Pep says, "Randy, this is one of the toughest guys I ever fought. He has my sincere respect and I wish him and all his family the best. They are all classy people and gentlemen. I trained very hard for this fight and toughened my body a lot more to deal with his power. I wish him the best, and me and my team will discuss where I go from here." RING

CARD SCORE

By Dan Rafael

Week after week, there is an array of sports card set releases, mainly representing the major team sports – soccer, baseball, football, basketball and ice hockey. There are also sets regularly produced for collectors devoted to golf, tennis, auto racing, MMA and more.

There is even a regular pipeline of cards for those who collect professional wrestling and non-sports properties such as Star Wars.

But boxing fans? We have been all but ignored, with precious little produced in recent decades, and nothing done in a major way since the mainstream release of the Kayo, All World and Ringside sets of the 1990s. Since then, boxing fans have had only the ongoing series of Seidman Productions cards, which are inserted into fight night programs produced by the company and quite limited, or the chance of getting lucky by finding a fighter or two included in a multi-sport set or some other oddball release.

At long last, however, boxing fans have gotten the royal treatment with a serious set to collect that comes with many of the bells and whistles that have become the hallmark of modern trading card releases, including autographed cards, limited-edition numbered cards, refractors and plenty of parallels to chase.

Topps, the granddaddy of sports cards, released its first boxing set in 74 years, Topps Chrome Boxing, which is officially designated as a 2024 product that was delayed until 2025. Topps bills the set as having "a mix of champions, contenders, rising stars and legendary names from the men's and women's ranks."

These are not traditional paper cards. Rather, they are made of "chromium paper," which gives them a shiny, metallic look and feel. Topps has used that technology for premium sets since 1996.

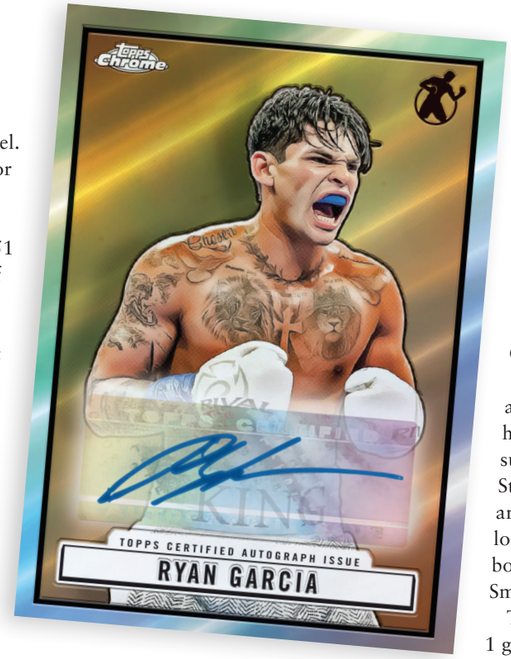
The last time Topps put out a boxing product was its iconic 1951 Ringside set that included stars of the time such as Joe Louis, Rocky Marciano, Sugar Ray Robinson and Jake LaMotta, as well as past legends such as Henry Armstrong and John L. Sullivan. That 96-card collection was produced in two 48-card series and has long been one of the most popular pugilistic sets, which the company has been producing since the 19th century.

Topps 2025 Chrome cases and boxes were available to pre-order in early September with the product shipping later in the month, and they sold out on the Topps website within a few minutes. I was poised in front of my computer at the moment the pre-sale went live and attempted to buy a case. I successfully added it to my cart, and when I went to pay for it, suddenly it disappeared because it had sold out before I could complete the order. As a die-hard boxing collector, I was not happy. At all.

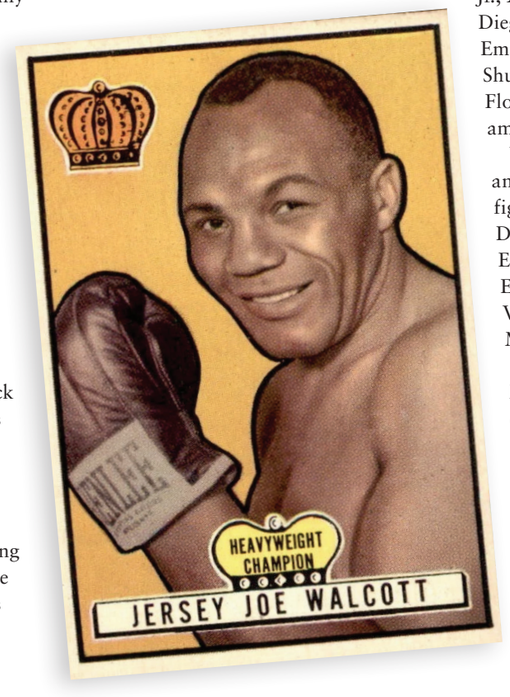
As disappointing as that was, there was at least a silver lining in that it meant there was at least tremendous interest in boxing and a market for the product, which probably bodes well for future releases.

There are 100 cards in the base set, and the cards come eight per pack with 12 packs per box and 12 boxes per case. Topps guarantees that each box will contain two autographed cards, four numbered parallels, four inserts and a total of 20 parallels.

If you could snag any boxes during the pre-sale, they cost $89.99 apiece but have been going for three times that on the secondary market.



There's plenty of variety in the Topps boxing set, with both new-age stars and old-school greats featured.



As impressive as the set looks, if there is one drawback, it's that the boxers are limited to those who fight under the Top Rank, Golden Boy Promotions and Matchroom Boxing banners with a few others included as well, such as Jake Paul. That means, for example, there is a lack of fighters from the deep Premier Boxing Champions and Queensberry Promotions rosters.

Nonetheless, there is still a diverse group of fighters to hunt for and some nice-looking subsets, including Ring Generals; Stablemates; 1951 Ringside, which are cards that pay homage to the look of the famed original Topps boxing set; Future Stars; Helix; Smash Hits; and Be First die-cuts.

The honor of being on card No. 1 goes to Paul. The set is also filled with rookie cards – as in the fighter's first appearance on a trading card, even though many are hardly rookies in the sport – including Dmitry Bivol, Jesse "Bam" Rodriguez, Brian Norman Jr., Xander Zayas, Jai Opetaia, Diego Pacheco, Andy Cruz, Emanuel Navarrete, Bruce "Shu Shu" Carrington, Conor Benn, Floyd Schofield and Oscar Collazo, among many others.

You want established stars and champions? The set includes fighters such as Tyson Fury, David Benavidez, Ryan Garcia, Errol Spence Jr., Jaron "Boots" Ennis, Vergil Ortiz, Oscar Valdez, Keyshawn Davis and Mikaela Mayer.

And if you are looking for legends, the set also has you covered with cards of Mike Tyson, Lennox Lewis, Sugar Ray Leonard, Thomas Hearns (including a card featuring both Kings that is dual signed), Floyd Mayweather Jr., Roy Jones Jr., Oscar De La Hoya and Christy Martin.

Happy hunting. RING

THE FIGHT DOCTOR

HOW TO PREVENT A KNOCKOUT

By Dr. Margaret Goodman

We all know a knockout when we see one, but what is the actual cause? Why do some fighters take a punch better than others? And is there a way to prevent one, other than a good defense?

Your brain sits suspended in your skull, surrounded by cerebrospinal fluid that behaves as a shock absorber when the head is struck or hits a solid surface. An acceleration blow occurs when a punch propels the brain in the direction it was given. A deceleration blow occurs when the fighter hits the canvas or when the brain stops moving within the skull. Both types of shots can cause a KO. In a true knockout, there is a loss of consciousness that results from dysfunction of an area in the back of the brain called the Reticular Activating System (RAS). The RAS keeps you awake unless it is disrupted. Hence another reason "rabbit punches" to the back of the head are prohibited in boxing. This resultant loss of consciousness is also a protective mechanism so your brain can shut down and "reboot."

From a physiological perspective (and before you zone out from TMI), the nerve cell membrane covering the brain is subject to trauma with a knockout. Calcium flows into the nerve cells, which causes them to swell. Energy from your body is sent to help pump out the calcium in the nerve cells so you can return to baseline.

Preventing susceptibility to a knockout is, in part, hereditary and dependent upon anatomy. Technically the skull's thickness won't prevent a knockout, but skull shape can slightly change the distribution of force. A more rounded skull can better deflect impact (like a helmet), but flatter areas like the jaw and temple are more vulnerable.

A well-fitted mouthguard can cushion a blow to the chin or jaw that would otherwise be transmitted to the temporal bone and base of the skull. It helps to stabilize the jaw. Biting on a strong mouthpiece tenses the jaw and even some neck muscles, which may reduce the snap of the head and lessen KO susceptibility. Those old-fashioned "boil and bite" mouthpieces are essentially worthless except for perhaps protecting the teeth, but a mouthguard made by a dentist every six months, fitted to the fighter's mouth, is crucial.

Strong neck muscles are paramount to preventing a KO by also acting as a shock absorber and reducing acceleration. The neck muscles are not just ones along your cervical spine but include your trapezius and sternocleidomastoid (muscles along the sides of your neck). If your neck doesn't move, it's harder to rotate or hyperextend your head. Fighters with stronger neck muscles who undergo resistance training, along with the all-important chin tuck, can better brace themselves against a punch. I remember videos of the great George Foreman training for a fight by pulling a tractor with a strap around his neck.

Most believe there is no such thing as a "glass jaw" that predisposes a fighter to a knockout.

Most believe there is no such thing as a "glass jaw" that predisposes a fighter to a knockout. It's more likely multifactorial: not seeing a punch coming, no chin tuck and especially weak neck muscles.

Simple progressive exercises (omitting the tractor) can really help. Below are some suggestions, but contact a strength and conditioning expert and your physician before proceeding.

Dave "Scooter" Honig, famed conditioning expert and trainer of many world champions and celebrities, notes: "A strong neck reduces the risk of concussion and can improve the posture in clinches and add stability against strikes."

Honig recommends the following exercises:

1. **Manual resistance by pushing your forehead into your hands forward and side to side. Three times a week, three sets of 30 seconds each.**
2. **Dynamic exercise: lying on your back on a bench with your head hanging off the end. In this instance, a light weight would be behind the head while flexing and returning your head to neutral. Do three sets of 10-20 reps each.**
3. **Seated on a bench, flexing and extending the neck with a five-pound plate attached to your head and hanging between your legs. The weight shouldn't be too heavy, to avoid straining.**
4. **Utilizing a cable weight machine with light resistance, attach a towel to the cable and bite down on it. Then turn your head to the side so that the motion is raising the weight. After several repetitions, reverse and exercise in the opposite direction.**

He also has his fighters strengthen their upper back with dumbbell shrugs and lat (latissimus dorsi) pulldowns.

How can a fighter who has physically healed come back from the emotional and mental aspect of a knockout?

There are many examples of a fighter who is "gun-shy" in their next fight after they've been knocked out. Self-doubt and fear of recurrence is normal. It's important to meet what happened "head-on" (sorry for the pun) and recognize that it doesn't define who they are as a fighter and instead view it as an opportunity to learn from what happened or what they did wrong, then make adjustments going forward. Sports psychologists would recommend mindfulness such as meditation to handle stress and anxiety. A strong support system from the fighter's trainer and family is crucial, as is setting attainable goals to rebuild confidence.

Dr. Carlos Alarid, a clinical psychologist with research emphasis on professional boxers, says, "It is understandable for a fighter to feel concerned about being knocked out again. If the boxer finds that their caution is affecting their performance or affecting their ability to 'pull the trigger' during a boxing match, it may be beneficial to consult with a sports psychologist to work out the mental kinks that may be preventing the boxer from being the fighter they are used to being. There are also online resources with keys to recovery."

Nothing can replace time in recovering from a knockout. Beyond staying out of the line of fire until cleared by medical professionals, each of us has our own timeline dependent on the factors above. Listening to your body and being in tune with how you feel can be as good as anything to prevent a recurrence when returning to competition. RING

Trampler has spent a lifetime in boxing and not always as a matchmaker.

BRUCE TRAMPLER WAS A FIGHTER

By Thomas Hauser

One of the little-known facts about Top Rank's Hall of Fame matchmaker Bruce Trampler is that he had five amateur fights.

Let's start with Trampler the matchmaker. Bruce learned the trade when he worked for the legendary Teddy Brenner at Madison Square Garden from 1977 through 1979. Then Brenner moved to Top Rank. In 1980, Trampler joined him.

Matchmaking is an art, not a science. "Either you want a good fight or you just want a 'W' on your guy's record," Hall of Fame promoter Russell Peltz once said. "If you want a good fight, you make a good fight. You have to give fans their money's worth or they won't come back."

But it's more nuanced than that. The matchmaker works for the promoter, not the fans. He (or she) serves the promoter's interests. The first question a matchmaker asks when filling out a card is, "What do I want to accomplish with these fights?" He might be trying to develop one of the promoter's fighters into a world-class boxer. That means finding an opponent who will be a good learning experience, last some rounds and test the fighter to determine where his skill level is. The way a fighter wins is also important in terms of developing him as an attraction. Sometimes, the promoter is simply trying to pad the record for a ticket-seller, whether he can fight or not.

A good matchmaker knows more than the old axiom "styles make fights." He can spot flaws that make one fighter vulnerable to another and match two boxers with equal ability and similar records against each other while still giving the edge to his guy.

"Most matchmakers are a little nuts," Trampler acknowledges. "How can it be considered normal to call two people and arrange to have them punch each other in the head in front of an audience?"

That brings us to Trampler as a fighter. In September 1967, he enrolled as an undergraduate at Ohio University with the intention of pursuing a career in journalism. Soon after, he interviewed a club fighter named Bill Douglas for the school newspaper. Twenty-three years later, Douglas' son would dethrone Mike Tyson and claim the heavyweight throne.

Meanwhile … "There was a school boxing club," Trampler remembers. "Nothing fancy. A couple of coaches and 10 or 12 kids. We didn't even have a ring. Just a gym mat and gloves. It was a bunch of kids fooling around."

Then, in February 1968, Douglas' promoter (a man named Bill Cummings) suggested to Bruce that he sign up for the Golden Gloves at Cooper Arena in Columbus, about 70 miles from campus.

"I wanted to do it," Trampler says. "It had always been on my mind. So I took a bus to Columbus. I was in the novice division, or the sub-novice division if they had one. I was 18 years old. I'd literally never been in a boxing ring in my life before that fight.

"On fight night, I wore black sneakers. They gave me a mouthpiece because I didn't have one. And they gave me a gold robe with black lapels to wear for the night. I'd gotten friendly with Bill Douglas by then. He came to the fight, wrapped my hands and worked my corner.

"They lined up all the fighters and we sat in chairs on opposite sides of the ring. We could look across the ring and see the guy we'd be fighting. When each new fight started, they moved us down a chair until, finally, someone said, 'OK, you're on deck.' I warmed up. Then I was in the ring.

"The guy I fought was named Sam Orso. I was six-one and weighed 156 pounds. He was tall and lanky, so we were about the same size. I was nervous but not scared. The bell rang, and then it was just me and him. Orso wasn't an aggressive guy. I was trying to be one, but it wasn't effective aggression. I never hurt him and he never hurt me. I outworked him and won a three-round decision.

As a matchmaker, Trampler was instrumental in the early career of Floyd Mayweather Jr.

"I'd won, so I fought again the next night. On the day of the second fight, Bill Douglas took me to a sporting goods store and bought me a better mouthpiece. Unfortunately, the second fight ended very differently from the first. I got stopped. I can't tell you how it happened. All I remember is the floor on my left side coming up toward my face. I'm told I got up, got massacred, and they stopped it. But I don't remember any of that. The next thing I remember is I was sitting in the dressing room and Bill Douglas was buttoning my shirt and a doctor was asking if I was OK. My new mouthpiece had been knocked out when I went down and the referee didn't put it back in. So while I was getting battered around the ring, my upper lip got split. We went to the hospital and I needed 64 stitches, microstitches, inside and outside."

But Trampler kept fighting.

"Was I going to be a pro fighter?" he asks rhetorically. "No. But I enjoyed it. I won two more fights by decision and was stopped again in a fight when I was knocked down twice. I never knocked anybody down. That wasn't for lack of trying. It just never happened. Then I started getting headaches, so I gave it up. Looking back on it all, my first fight is the one that means the most to me. Your first car; your first girl. It's special. You don't forget something like that.

"If I had it to do over again," Trampler says in closing, "I'd hold my hands higher and keep my chin down. But I'm glad I did it. It was something I wanted to experience. And the fact that I did it has probably helped me over the years in relating to fighters. There's a bond between us. We all got hit in the head." RING

Thomas Hauser's email address is thomashauserwriter@gmail.com. His most recent book – The Most Honest Sport: Two More Years Inside Boxing – is available at Amazon.com. In 2019, Hauser was selected for boxing's highest honor – induction into the International Boxing Hall of Fame.

COMMISSIONER'S CORNER

LINEAGE OF A LEGACY

By Randy Gordon

In the weeks of watching the buildup to the Canelo Alvarez-Terence Crawford fight and the terrific card itself, I found myself full of wonderful memories and drenched by a tsunami of pride. It was a feeling probably only I – and perhaps Nigel Collins and Steve Farhood – could feel. The three of us once sat at the helm of Ring Magazine and poured every ounce of ourselves into this fantastic "Bible of Boxing."

I began thinking of the inimitable, incomparable Bert Randolph Sugar, whose genius, vision and open-mindedness resurrected a lifeless publication that was already on its way to the "Magazine Graveyard."

It was May 1979. It was early evening. With my wife, a clothing buyer, working late, I had just made dinner for my 2-year-old daughter Ali, gave her a bath, read her a bedtime story, then tucked her in for the night, kissing her and saying, "I love you and I'm crazy about you."

Soon after she fell asleep, I began typing a story about up-and-coming heavyweight Gerry Cooney (I never dreamed that, 46 years later, we'd be doing a national radio show together!) on my old Remington Rand(y) typewriter. The story was for World and International Boxing Magazines, of which I was the editor.

I was just about finished with the story when my phone rang. It was from publisher, author, writer, fedora-wearing, cigar-smoking Bert Randolph Sugar.

When I answered, he began, "Hello, Randolph, this is another Randolph – Bert Randolph Sugar." I recognized the name, but not from boxing. I had been a reader of Argosy, a prestigious pulp magazine that featured fiction stories written by some of the day's top writers, and knew his name as being an editor of the magazine. Sugar, an avid boxing enthusiast, collector and historian, had also been the publisher of Boxing Illustrated from 1969-1973. His phone call was about to change my life.

"Randy, I have a business proposition for you," said Sugar. I listened.

"I have just purchased Ring Magazine, and I'd like you to be a part of my new journey," he continued. I was all ears. My job at World and International Boxing and Big Book of Boxing paid the bills, but our publisher, Stanley Weston, had no interest in trying to purchase The Ring, which was at the lowest point in its 57-year history.

Al Pereira

The inimitable Bert Sugar was editor and publisher of The Ring for four years.

"When it's your money, YOU purchase The Ring," Weston said to me. I wished I could have.

Rather than tell me his plan over the phone, Sugar set up a lunch meeting with me the following Saturday at O'Reilly's Pub in New York City. It was Sugar's favorite "watering hole," a place where both Bert and I wrote and edited nearly five years of Ring Magazine.

When I walked into O'Reilly's, I saw him sitting at a far table. He was holding court with several patrons. A cigar was in his mouth and a drink in his hand. A black fedora was on his head. His sports jacket looked like it was made of colorful quilts, and it didn't match his salmon-colored pants. His tie didn't match any part of his outfit, either, but I liked it, because it bore the likenesses of Joe Louis, Henry Armstrong, Sugar Ray Robinson and Jack Dempsey.

As I approached his table, he noticed me. Our eyes locked. It was the first time we had ever officially seen each other. I simply knew of his reputation. He knew of my growing status in boxing.

"LADIES AND GENTLEMEN," roared Bert. "SAY HELLO TO THE NEW EDITOR OF THE RING. HIS NAME IS RANDY GORDON." He shook my hand and hugged me.

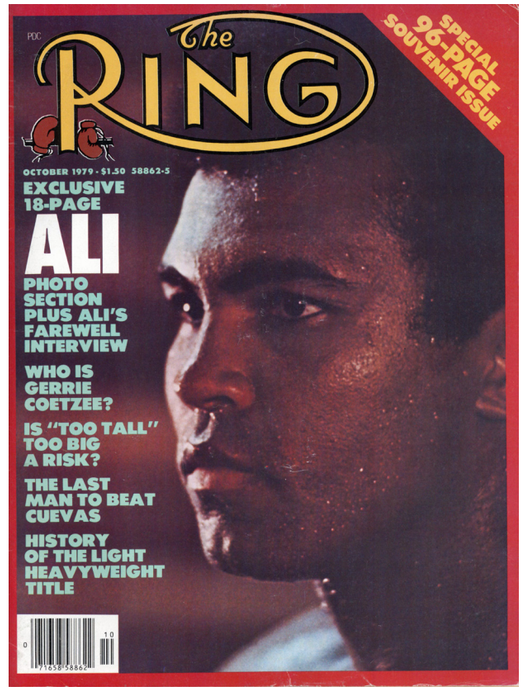
"You mean I'm hired?" I asked, almost in a whisper.

"You mean you'll accept?" he replied.

I said "I do," almost feeling like I was getting married again.

To the 30 or so patrons in the restaurant, Bert shouted, "HE ACCEPTS! RANDY ACCEPTS! DRINKS ARE ON ME!"

The 30 or so patrons in O'Reilly's stood and cheered. The resurrection of The Ring had begun!



Gordon made his debut as editor with the October 1979 issue of The Ring.

From our first issue, The Ring was back. It had a great new look. Top writers returned. What Bert and I now wanted, as much as readership, was respect from everyone who picked up the magazine.

That respect came almost instantly, as the magazine looked incredible and its stories were what every boxing fan wanted.

As for the Ring ratings, we needed to rebuild them. They had become worthless after the "United States Boxing Championships" in 1977, in which the magazine's ratings were shown to be as phony as a three-dollar bill.

Bert and I sent out ballots to 100 boxing writers and announcers around the world. I compiled them by hand (remember, there were no home computers in 1979), working seven days a week on them. As respect returned, I was hired by HBO as their boxing consultant and by NBC as their statistical producer. On the frequent boxing telecasts of *SportsWorld*, NBC's blow-by-blow announcer, Marv Albert, made sure to mention The Ring in every telecast, telling viewers where each fighter they covered was rated – or not – by The Ring. No mention was made of any of the sanctioning bodies. It was only The Ring that was mentioned. Nobody else! Soon, CBS began doing the same thing. ABC, which had been burned so badly by the implosion of the United States Boxing Championships, sadly began to withdraw from its coverage of boxing.

Now, 46 years removed from that first meeting with Bert Sugar and reaching for our dream of making The Ring ratings the sport's most accepted and respected ratings and The Ring championship belt the one world title a fighter wants strapped around his/her waist, that day has arrived.

It's been given to us by TKO Boxing. And Zuffa Boxing. And Riyadh Season.

I know Bert Randolph Sugar is smiling.

Thank you, Nat Fleischer, for starting The Ring. I know you are smiling, too.

Thank you, Bert, for your vision to revive it and believing in me.

Thank you, Doug Fischer, for bringing me back to The Ring.

And to Dana White.

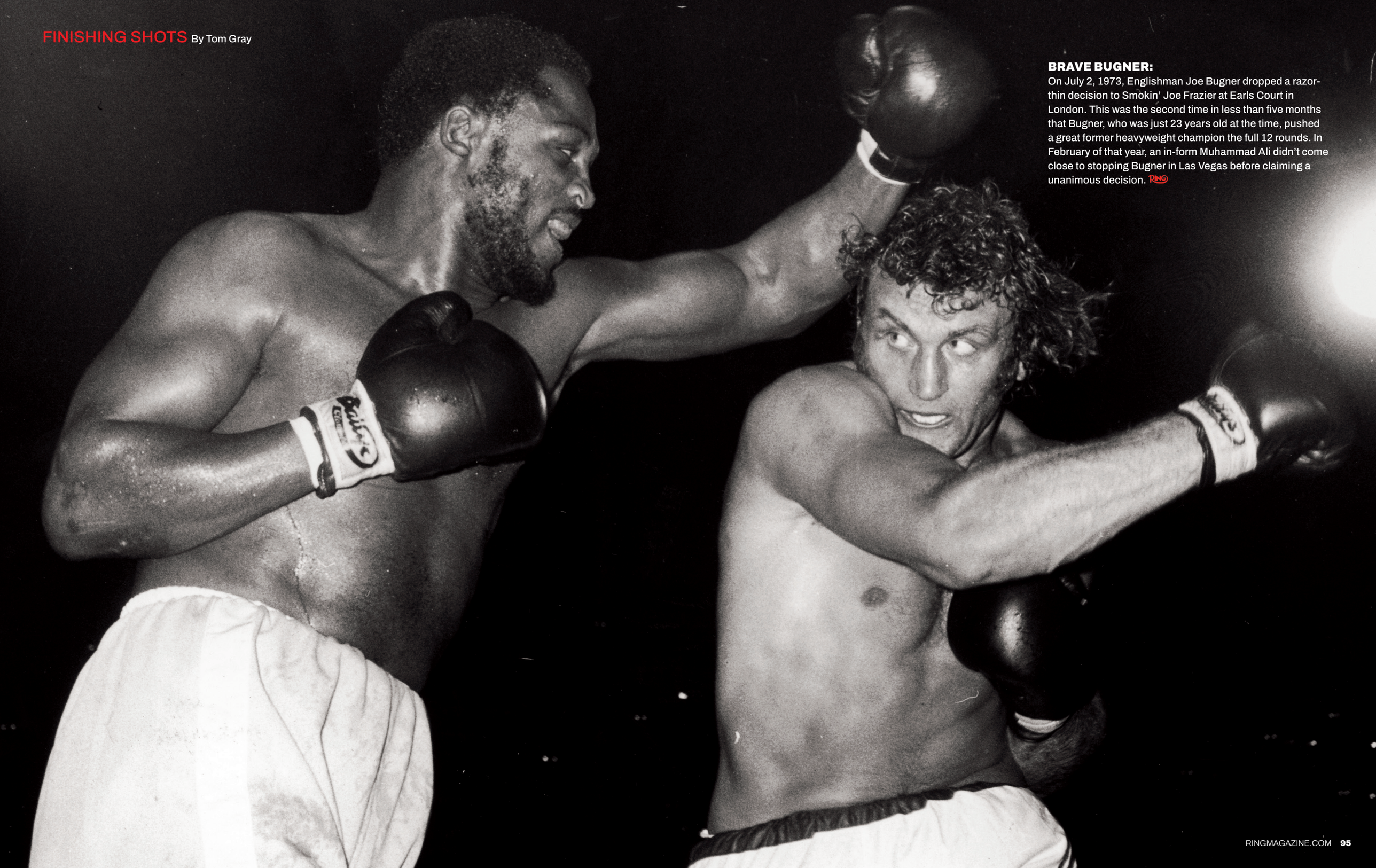
And to Nick Khan.

And to His Excellency, whose ownership and enthusiasm for the sport has turned The Ring into everything a boxing aficionado could want, a very special thank you.

Boxing is in great hands with these guys.

I am not the only one who thanks them.

The entire boxing world thanks you! RING



BRAVE BUGNER:
On July 2, 1973, Englishman Joe Bugner dropped a razor-thin decision to Smokin' Joe Frazier at Earls Court in London. This was the second time in less than five months that Bugner, who was just 23 years old at the time, pushed a great former heavyweight champion the full 12 rounds. In February of that year, an in-form Muhammad Ali didn't come close to stopping Bugner in Las Vegas before claiming a unanimous decision. RING

FIGHTLINE

BY DOUG FISCHER

Fights only last a matter of minutes, but fighters are connected to each other by chains that extend for decades – even centuries – into the past. Their bond is a lineage built face-to-face: A young prospect struggles with the skills of an aging veteran whose nose was once broken by a fighter now enshrined in the International Boxing Hall of Fame. In that way, muscle memory carries knowledge and boxers face a piece of everyone their opponent has fought, everyone those people fought, and so on.

This month we're linking two American pound-for-pound kings of their respective eras – **Sugar Ray Leonard** and **Terence Crawford.**

Leonard, the darling of the hugely successful 1976 U.S. Olympic squad, was immediately recognized as the heir apparent to Muhammad Ali in terms of his star potential. However, the native of Palmer Park, Maryland, proved to be a generational boxing talent as well as a crossover attraction, rocketing to his first world title – seized from previously unbeaten wunderkind Wilfred Benitez – within three years of his pro debut.

Over the next two years (1980-1981), Leonard cemented his status as the pound-for-pound best with back-to-back showdowns against the legendary Roberto Duran and an epic 14th-round stoppage of Thomas Hearns for the undisputed welterweight championship.

Crawford established himself as an elite boxer by winning the Ring lightweight title in 2014 and earning undisputed champion status at junior welterweight three years later. His road to collecting all the 147-pound belts took longer than it did for Leonard due to the fractured nature of this era's boxing industry. However, when the Omaha native finally received the opportunity to prove his pound-for-pound skillset and mettle vs. Errol Spence Jr. in 2023, he shined like a supernova, handing the unified beltholder his first loss via dominating ninth-round TKO. Like Leonard, who briefly retired after defending his Ring/WBA/WBC 147-pound belts against Bruce Finch in 1982, Crawford wouldn't remain undisputed welterweight champ for long.

After a pit stop at 154 pounds, annexing the same WBA title that Leonard won prior to facing Hearns, the 37-year-old veteran pursued history at super middleweight.

Crawford's performance vs. Canelo Alvarez drew comparisons to Leonard's storied showing against Marvin Hagler for the Ring/lineal/WBC middleweight championship. And why not? Both Crawford and Leonard were coming up in weight to face the long-reigning kings of their respective mountains. Hagler and Alvarez's records were nearly identical going into those megaevents (Canelo, at 63-2-2, was boxing's most experienced champion; the Marvelous One held a 62-2-2 ledger going into 1987).

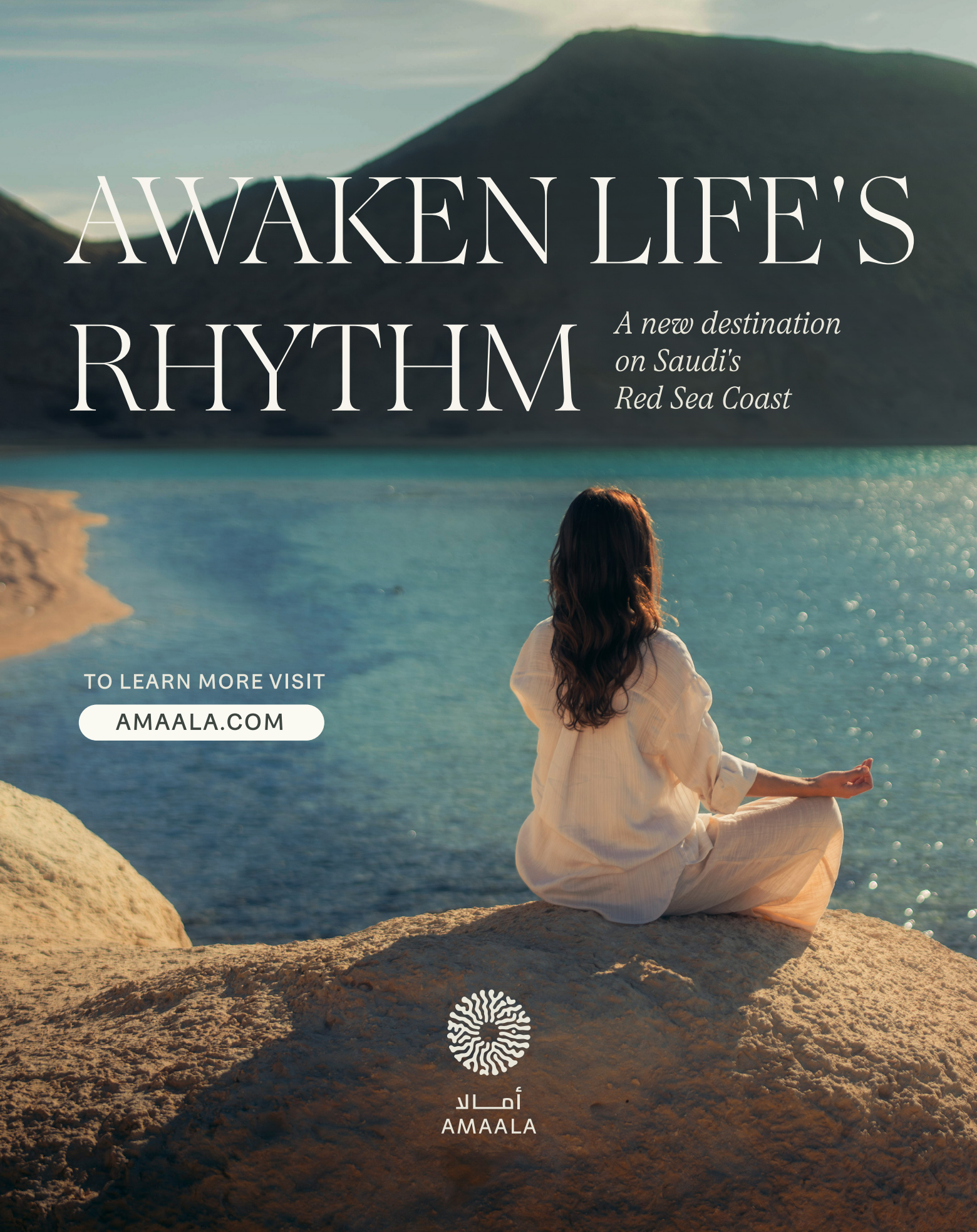
Leonard shocked the world with a split decision over Hagler and then hung around for two more superfights: his challenge to 175-pound beltholder Donny Lalonde (at 168 pounds) and the long-awaited raucous rematch with Hearns. Crawford's UD didn't shock the boxing community, but should he stick around for a couple more fights, as Leonard did, we will be pleasantly surprised.

There are multiple paths linking the five-division champs, whose primes are separated by 40 years, but we found this five-boxer Fightline.

Can you find a faster route?

If so, or if you have another Fightline you'd like to submit, send it to comeoutwriting@gmail.com. And remember, some fighters can be linked on paper by jumping forward and backward in time, but to be a true lineage, the fights must come in chronological order. RING

NHC
VIBRANT COMMUNITIES
Shaping spaces that inspire living, learning and connection
nhc.sa


AWAKEN LIFE'S RHYTHM
A new destination on Saudi's Red Sea Coast
TO LEARN MORE VISIT
AMAALA.COM
أمالا
AMAALA